

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on October 17, 2021:**

**"Church as Priests
(Hebrews 5:1-10, 1 Peter 2:9)"**

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman, at church in the Y, shows us that as New Covenant priests we are called to let the light and love of Jesus shine into our community.]

Introduction:

- How many of you woke up this morning thinking, "I need to get up and offer gifts and sacrifices for sins for my people, as a priest."
- And how many of you here have been appointed by God as priests? All of us have.
- We probably don't have these thoughts.
- So, let's take a look at what Hebrews has to tell us about this.

Hebrews 5:1 (NASB), For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of people in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;

- Now, there's a lot said here.
- This harkens back to the priesthood of Aaron.
- Aaron was appointed as High Priest.

- Now, there were others that sought that position – we can think of King Saul, Uzzah, and Korah.
- When they tried to appoint themselves as high priests out of their humanity, it didn't go very well, because any priest needs to be appointed by God.
- Now, this also says something about each one of us, this morning.

2) he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is clothed in weakness;

- So, when Aaron went into the temple to offer sacrifices, he first had to offer sacrifices for himself, because out of his humanity, he was a sinner.
- After that, he then offered sacrifices for the people.

3) and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins for himself, as well as for the people.

- So, here's the unique distinction that we know from our incarnational Trinitarian theology – in Aaron's time, there was still a need for a sacrifice for sin.
- But, in our day, under the New Covenant, that's not what priests do.
- We need to find out what it means that we have been appointed priests.
- And how does this relate to the church and how does do we need to participate in what Jesus is as the Great High Priest.

4) And no one takes the honor for himself, but receives it when he is called by God, just as Aaron also was.

- So, we don't take on this role as a priest by ourselves.
- But, we need to understand, that we didn't have a choice in this.
- Now, the question we need to answer today is this, "If we're priests, then what exactly is our job?"

5) So too Christ did not glorify Himself in becoming a high priest, but it was He who said to Him, "You are My Son, Today I have fathered You";

- So, just as Jesus did not choose His role as priest, because God did appoint Him as priest because He was His Son.

6) just as He also says in another passage, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

- Now, how many of us know a lot about Melchizedek?
- I reality, Melchizedek was a mystery.
- Now, *melek* means "king" and *zedek* means "righteousness".
- So, Melchizedek was the king of righteousness.
- And when Melchizedek shows up on the scene with Abraham, it means that there was a greater priesthood than Aaron, and the Levitical priesthood that was established later.

7) In the days of His humanity, He offered up both prayers and pleas with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His devout behavior.

8) Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

9) And having been perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey Him, 10) being designated by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

- We see that Jesus was predicted to become the Great High Priest through this mysterious person who showed up on the scene as Melchizedek.
- We can probably say that Melchizedek was the forerunner of Jesus, Himself.
- So, what does this mean for us?
- Jesus has taken all of humanity into Himself, reconciled us, forgave us of our sin, both past, present and future, which becomes meaningful to us when we believe it and when we experience it.
- Now, we have to have belief and experience in order to know that we've been forgiven and included in that royal priesthood.
- So, if we were appointed, as a royal family and as a royal priesthood, the logical question is, "Why?"
- So, we carry on in that royal line of priesthood from Jesus today, as we participate in His priesthood in what we're doing.

A royal family:

- So, every Sunday morning, when Pastor Craig says, “Welcome dear family and welcome to Grace”, he’s welcoming a royal family.
- And our royalty comes as a result from the fact that each of us has been appointed by God as priests and as a royal priesthood.
- So, how do we know this?
- Well, there is one passage of scripture that tells us this.

1 Peter 2:9 (NASB), But you are a chosen people, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- So, why are we a royal priesthood?
- Peter was inspired to tell us – so that we can “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
- This means that we are called to share the good news of Jesus.
- It’s that simple!
- Now, simple doesn’t necessarily make something easy.
- Now, if you had a choice, would you rather live in darkness or would you rather live in light?
- But, in reality, we don’t have that choice, because it was chosen for us.
- We, now, live in the Light because God gave it to us as a gift.
- So, the next question is, “How are we living out that life, as royal priests today?”
- That’s also our challenge.
- Now, it’s not only a question and challenge for each one of us, but also for the church, today.

A healthy church:

- Now, for the past few years, we’ve heard the term, “a healthy church.”
- It’s the vision of our denomination – Grace Communion International.
- Now, in the past, we’ve continued to say that we’re here to share the love of God without fear, shame, guilt or doubt.
- That’s one way to describe a healthy church.
- Now, if we’re just sharing among ourselves, and do not have an outward focus, we’re not that healthy.
- So, we have some work to do in order to have an outward focus.
- Now, we’re here to love each other, we’re here to support each other and we’re here to let that same love be known to those who are still in darkness and who have not been exposed to God’s light as we have.
- So, when we proclaim Jesus’ excellencies of going from darkness to light, we are letting our love and our light shine to those outside.
- Now, Jesus told us that the mission of the church was to reach out, proclaim, teach and make disciples.

- So, we must be sharing the gospel and making disciples to those who haven't been called or have been called, but their light has dimmed to them.
- So, denominationally, what do we have to do to become healthy and grow so that the Holy Spirit would welcome those whom He's working with to become part of our church?
- First, let's take a look at what is the opposite of a healthy church, which is a sick church.
- Now, Pastor Craig is NOT saying that our church is sick.

Symptoms of Sickness: [This comes from a book by Thom S. Rainer, "Autopsy of a Deceased Church."]

- In 2014, he said that there were over 150,000 churches that could be defined as sick.
- These churches had a decline in worship attendance over the past 5 years.
- Now, we've experienced that.
- He also wrote that when the numbers are ignored they tend to worsen.
- Another symptom – ministries and programs are more for members rather than those outside. Are we like that?
- Symptom: no sense of true disciple-making taking place.
- Symptom: no clear plan for making disciples.
 - Now, we have a plan, but we haven't engaged many people into it.
 - We haven't put new believers through a disciple making process, because we haven't seen a need for that.
- Another symptom: busyness and activity without meaningful purpose that contributes little to making disciples.
- Now, these are symptoms of a sick church, not defined by GCI, but by the entire church landscape here in the United States.

Four Responses in Thom Rainer's book :

1. Pray that God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach into the community where the church is located.
 - Unfortunately, a heavy emphasis of ours has not been prayer – corporate prayer, organized prayer.
 - Pastor Craig believes that we have a lack of comfort in group prayer and corporate prayer and coming together to have a prayer vigil.
 - It might be a good idea if we started organizing prayer vigils.
 - Now, we pray a lot for sick members, but answering our calling as royal priests, we have some work to do.
 - For us to focus on prayer for our outreach would probably be a good step.
2. Take an honest audit of how church members spend their time being involved.
 - Are we more interested in being involved here inside the Y or something outside the Y within the community?
3. Take an audit of how the church spends its money.
 - Now, most of our resources have been spent internally.
4. Make specific plans to minister and to evangelize our community.
 - None of us here need to be evangelized – we are already evangelized.

Concluding thoughts:

- We have to get out of this COVID melee we've been sucked into and to move forward as royal priests into the community.
- Pastor Craig recently had a breakfast meeting with Carol, our Y executive director.
- She asked, "What can we do to rebuild the Y and focus on families with young kids, and how can your church participate in that? What are some of the plans that the church would like to do?"
- Pastor Craig is thinking that next year, why couldn't we have a catered Thanksgiving meal and invite those into the Y gymnasium who might not have planned a special meal that day.
- Our denomination has asked us to focus on local neighborhood camps, which we can do with the Y.
- There are 2 elementary schools near the Y, "Wild Rose" and "Brad Oaks" – Pastor Craig is planning to meet with the principals and ask them, what do they need and how can our church participate?
- Now, Pastor Craig wants all of us, as royal priests, involved in these projects.
- God does things by all of us participating.
- God wouldn't invite us into something that we weren't called into and equipped to do.
- Hopefully, all of this makes sense, because our very life, as a church, depends upon it.
- Our calling is let our light and our love shine to the community so that they know that we are here to support them and love them without fear, shame, guilt or doubt.
- May we all participate in that process.

Closing prayer: