

1 Peter 2:5-6

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." This precious value, then, is for you who believe.

Last week, we talked about throwing off our mantle of shame which protects our core ethic of goodness; an ethic that was developed when the first lie was spoken over humanity: we can be like God. I know we have all been wrestling with this issue this past week and it has become so clear that at the root of all our fight in our flesh is this desire to be good. The original lie, the first wrong belief, became part of our DNA and the root of the sin that has been passed down from generation to generation. Regardless of where you go in this world, everyone wants to be known as good, or not as bad as others, thereby justifying their place in this world, their existence, and their reason to be wanted, loved, accepted, and validated. In fact, all our worthlessness issues, narcissistic tendencies, selfishness, stubbornness, and that gross sickly pride that keeps us loving and devoted to our flesh, stem from this wrong belief.

But as we know, the truth is that only God is good. This truth crushes the wrong belief about our own goodness; it literally destroys it and scatters it to pieces. But God does not leave us in this place of brokenness, helplessness, and devastation. Rather, He says that if we will accept the truth, reject the wrong belief, and throw

ourselves upon Him so He can break every part of us that has been trained to love and promote ourselves according to this goodness ethic, He will give us a completely different and alternate way to live.

I will address this substitute way of living, but first I want to take a moment to discuss practically what it means to fall upon the rock. It starts with a *willingness* to agree with God that we need His goodness in everything and that our goodness simply will not do and cannot do. Once you are done wrestling over this reality and accept this truth, then you need to *pray* and ask the Lord to break off all the pieces in your soul that holds together this lie and keeps you always wanting, yearning, longing, and fighting; and which, by the way, keeps you very lonely. If you *make the invitation* He will respond. Now some of you have long felt that when you pray God is too far away and does not meet you in your place of need. Well, I encourage you to test Him in this matter. Invite Him to come and dismantle this lie and I guarantee that you will see how quickly He responds to your invitation. The swiftness of His response will assure you that despite how He makes Himself known to you, He always hears you and always is there.

The next step is to *not be surprised* when He starts tearing at these parts of your life which are built on the lie. Do not be freaked out, but *go with it*. Let Him have His way. Sure it is going to be uncomfortable and it will likely involve some pain, but remember what we studied in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, this is an opportunity to rejoice for the Father is teaching you how to live as a son of God. The difficulties and the trials will only last for a little while, so you don't need to fear. It will be measured with just the right amount of heat to get the job done.

1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The fire is necessary and it is to prove out to you how deep and strong your faith really is; and when you let the fire have its way, I know that you will come through the time of breaking stronger than you could ever imagine. Your faith will become less corrupted by your flesh and you will take another step towards being one of those believers who is steadfast and immovable. In fact, your intimacy with the Lord will go deeper and deeper and deeper. It is an amazing way to live. Throwing oneself upon the rock is very, very practical. And I have just told you what to expect, so you can be prepared. Further, I have walked this path and so has so many others in this fellowship. Therefore, you will not have to do this alone; you will have the help and support of a body who loves you. Believe me, that is what is fantastic about God placing you in a body that desires Him—you do not have to do this alone. You have a family and if you let them they will walk with you every step of the way; that is, if you let them.

So if we are going to shed our mantle of shame, which to date has forged our identity, what is the substitute? Well, **2:5** says that we are living stones, being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We already talked about what it means to

be living stones as part of a spiritual house, so let's focus on this priesthood because that is where our true identity is found.

The place that was once occupied exclusively by the tribe of Levi and the decedents of Aaron has now been conferred upon us. If you read *Leviticus*, which is about the role of the priests who descend from Levi (I literally just put that together—Leviticus/Levi), their lives were found in the midst of the people of God but completely separate; they did not even possess the customary tribal territory as others were permitted to do. They served the Lord and acted as an intermediary between God and the people. And that is our job. This was prophesied about in *Isaiah 61:6; 66:21*; and *Revelation 1:6* where it says. He has made us to be a kingdom of priests to His God and Father.

Often we think that those whom God has raised up to shepherd the body are the priests and they are the ones assigned to do the work of a priest. While it is true that they are priests, this passage makes it clear that if you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, you are also a priest and appointed to serve. This image of a holy priesthood gives some thickness to idea that we are Christ's set apart and holy ambassadors—those who plead with people to be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. That is what a priest does; his very life is a testament to the joy, freedom, and privilege of being one with Jesus.

In the days of old, the priesthood was a big deal. They were necessary for every part of the people's national, family, and individual lives. They were even involved in all the offerings that came before God: the offerings on behalf of the nation and the offerings that were offered up on behalf of the family and the individual. In fact, only the priests could enter the holy place and offer up prayers on behalf

of the people. And then only the high priest could enter the holy of holies (the very presence of God), once a year, to plead for God's grace on behalf of the people. And all of this activity was not just at the center of their religion, it was the center—the heartbeat—of the people's very lives.

According to **Hebrews 10:21-22** this very same privilege that was an exclusive right of the priesthood has been granted to us: "And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's people, let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting Him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water." Our shame has been removed; and despite our sin and failure we are not shamed down. Rather, we have been cleansed and given the unprecedented privilege to serve others on behalf of the Father. Accordingly, the way to the Father is opened for us anytime we want it, not just once a year. We can come into His presence as His children over and over and over again anytime we want. That is the privilege He has given us and it is a privilege far greater than any in the Levitical priesthood ever knew.

Do you understand that the Spirit is trying so hard to get you to realize and accept the truth of how special and valuable you are? You are at the center—the heartbeat—of all that God wants to do on this earth in nations, with families, and with individuals; you are it. That is your identity and He wants you to embrace it. The priests were holy, which just means they were set apart and dedicated to the service of God and to the people. The priesthood was not just their occupation, it was their life. Each of them had their own specific duty and regardless of their individual assignment, it was considered to be sacred, holy, and a privilege.

As to being set apart, the fact that they had no tribal property was a picture of our living as aliens and strangers in this world. This world is not our territory and even though we have been sent here to do the Father's work, it belongs to others not to us. Unlike others who embrace this world and have decided practically to make their abode in this world, that is not for you and for me. Our studies in the book of *Revelation* made it clear that we do not want to be found as one who has made their abode in this world. Thus, we need to embrace our identity and live as these holy and set apart priests. We have been sent on a mission from our Father and our job is to plead with those who belong to this system of shame to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ for they will not be disappointed, as He is the only rock upon which they can build their lives.

We have worked so hard over the years going piece by piece through the wrong belief and unbelief in our souls. God has been so faithful to show us each and every piece that needs to be replaced with faith. And now God has shown us what I believe is the core wrong belief when it comes to our individual fight in the flesh; thus, He is likely going to give us opportunity after opportunity to help others realize this truth. I know that He has trained us in order that way we might instruct others and give them a pathway they can walk—a pathway that has been well trod so they know it is safe and leads to freedom and salvation from self. You see, as a priest you have a very active purpose in this life; therefore, you must make the choice to lay aside your selfishness and embrace your new identity.

Next, let's talk about these spiritual sacrifices in light of the various offerings the priests would conduct on behalf of the people. A quick read of ***Leviticus 1-7*** and you will find there were burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings, sin

offerings and guilt offerings and in **Leviticus 23** there is the drink offering. Each of these offerings was a symbol, an image, and picture of the sacrifices which Jesus would offer up during His time on this earth. But they also had a secondary meaning; they served as a symbol, an image, and a picture of the sacrifices we, as priests, are to offer up to God through Jesus Christ. By the way, “offer up” is in the *aorist active infinitive*, which means that offering up sacrifices is to be our way of life; from beginning to end our life as priests is to be marked by these sacrifices.

For example, the burnt offering is symbolic of our putting down our old man, killing him, sacrificing him continually, day-in-and-day-out, until he is entirely consumed by the fire. **Romans 12:1** instructs us, by the mercies of God, to offer up our lives as a living and holy sacrifice. It is our spiritual service of worship or the proper activity of a priest. And, as you would expect, “offer up” in this passage is also in the *aorist active infinitive*; it is to be our way of life.

Isaiah 66:20 explains that bringing people to the Lord is a grain offering. Paul picks up on this in **Romans 15:16** and talks about his acceptable offering of the gentiles to God. Therefore, when we introduce people to Jesus, we are offering up a grain offering as grain is a symbol of humanity.

The peace offering, also known as a free-will offering, was quite unique in that all ate from it: some was burned on the altar before the Lord and the rest was shared between the priest and those who brought the offering. It connected God, the priest, and the people in fellowship through a shared meal. It was a picture of the *Koinonia* fellowship we are to share as true believers. **Ephesians 5:1-2** makes it clear that we are to be imitators of God and walk in love just as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant

aroma. As all share in His love, they are to also share in our love as our lives are offered up as a sacrifice to God on their behalf. And it is in this sacrifice that we can all share and experience a depth and intimacy that completely satisfies. Think about this sacrifice. Do you really inconvenience yourself and your plans and your wants for others? Do you really give yourself as a sacrifice for others? It is to be your way of life—your peace offering.

Another example of a peace offering is found in **Hebrews 13:15-16** which says, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” In this peace offering, others benefit from our sacrifice of praise. When we open up our mouths and honor God for who He is and all that He does, it is a blessing that refreshes the soul. Sometimes when you come to a church service and you don’t feel like singing, it is important that you set aside your feelings and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to be completely consumed on the altar so you can freely offer up your praises as a thanks offering for God saving you from yourself and being all that He promised He would be.

In so doing others will be blessed as they hear you sing and see you worship and give yourself to the Lord. And that will encourage them to sacrifice their selfish feelings as a burnt offering and join in the praise and adoration of Jesus. As we collectively follow suit, and as a body offer up this sacrifice of praise, we will all be blessed and encouraged as our souls are open and vulnerable before the Lord and our intimacy and Koinonia will be shared and taken to new levels; and it will be like a four course meal that is ever so delicious.

Similarly, when we do good, or let God's goodness flow through our lives, and share with others what God has given to us, practically, emotionally, and spiritually, it is also an acceptable peace offering to God. This also requires us to start with a burnt offering—the removal of our selfishness—so we can choose to intentionally love others with the love which the Spirit gives to us.

And finally, ***Philippians 4:18-19*** also makes it clear that when we financially support those who are teaching and shepherding others, it is a sweet smelling sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God; and in ***1 Timothy 5:17*** Paul makes it clear that those who serve in this capacity are to get a double portion. The point is that this offering is a very powerful sacrifice since money is so near and dear to our hearts. We love our money and we love to think that we are the ones who have to care for ourselves and protect what we have. But God says we are to give our money as a sacrifice trusting that He will care for us; trusting that He is our provider and caretaker. The reality is that the more we hold on to our money and try to protect our future, the worse it is for us. God intervenes and works against us; whereas, if we are willing to offer up these sacrifices, He works for us and protects and provides for our needs.

Malachi 3:8-12

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and

pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. "Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the Lord of hosts. "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts.

We are to test God in this way and freely offer up our peace offering. He invites the test; He wants to prove Himself to us. But He wants us to trust Him first and He promises He will be faithful. Yes, when we financially support those who are teaching and shepherding others, it is a sweet smelling sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. We must not be found hoarding and trying to protect and care for ourselves; as priest we are to live by trusting that our God is our provision, and that is why this sacrifice is so necessary; it is about truly and practically risking our lives on who God says He is and what He says He will do. Thus, when we give freely it is such a sweet smelling sacrifice.

As far as the sin offering, I believe that is addressed in John **1 John 1:9-10**. John says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Confession however is not just a casual recital of what we know we have done wrong, but a full-on agreement or profession of our wrong. It is fully owning our wrong and acknowledging, without shame and without excuse or justification, that our choices have been a product of our flesh, our coping mechanisms, our self-protection, and all that is not of God. Our sin offering is about coming to Him in the truth and freely receiving from Him the mercy and grace which He has lavishly poured upon our lives. And once we have truly confessed, the implication is that we will then leave the altar and

do it differently, which is repentance. Confession and repentance go together like the sin offering and the burnt offering; both require fire. Confession and repentance is our decision to burn our flesh so we will no longer follow its leading in our life and instead we choose to follow the Spirit's leading.

As far as the guilt offering, which was offered up for unintentional sins of the nation, the family, and the individual, I believe that each and every time we stop and consider that only God is good and realize that so much of what we have done in our day was not good, albeit not intentional, and we confess it before the Lord, we offer up an acceptable guilt offering. The Lord wants us to agree with Him always that only His life in ours is good. He wants us to realize that as long as we live in these bodies of flesh, there will be times we do not live out of His Spirit; and He wants us to be honest about this reality, humble ourselves, and seek His cleansing.

Finally, there is one other sacrifice that is not recorded in *Leviticus 1-7* so it is often missed, but it comes up in *Leviticus 23* and that is the drink offering. There are a lot of rules about this offering, but in effect it is an offering of celebration of a completed work. Paul tells the Philippians that his life is being poured out like a drink offering (*Philippians 2:17*). Paul is saying that his life is a celebration of the work which Christ had completed in Him and through him and which was for their primary benefit. Paul also explains it more fully to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my

departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Our choosing to live as aliens on this earth, as priest of the living God, is an acceptable drink offering. It is a celebration of all that God has done in us and all the ways that He has saved us from ourselves and freed us from our shame to be a people who can love with His divine love; which, as we know, is the mark of a true believer, a true son of God. It is a celebration of the way we can be used in the lives of others, poured out if you may, so that they can walk the path we have walked and find freedom and the salvation from their *Old Sinful Nature*.

I want you to think about these spiritual sacrifices, the burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings, and drink offerings, in light of building intimacy with God. In the first teaching in the How God Speaks series we addressed the 5 essential factors that need to be present in order to have a healthy, vibrant, and successful relationship with God, for any relationship really, especially if we expect to experience intimacy, oneness, and security. One of the 5-factors was mutuality. Jesus is our High Priest and He took the first steps to establish mutuality in that He came to earth as a man to experience all that we have experienced. As such, He is sympathetic to all our weaknesses and our temptations. He knows what we go through in these bodies of flesh; He has gone through it and He offered up all these sacrifices on our behalf so we can become His children. Now He is asking us to *reciprocate* and to make the relational choice

of mutuality—to walk the path He walked and to fulfill our role as priests offering up spiritual sacrifices so that others can be reconciled to God. He has done it; and, now as His children, He wants us to follow the pathway He has trod confident it is safe and secure.

On a little side note; if anyone has ever been thoroughly confused by the bizarre passage in ***Ezekiel 40-48*** regarding a new temple and all the detail regarding the role of the priests and the sacrifices they offer, perhaps it can best be understood in light of this new temple which is made up of living stones of which Christ is the cornerstone, in which holy priests are performing all manner of spiritual sacrifices in their service of God and the people. And since, according to ***Ezekiel 43:12***, the basic law of the Temple is absolute holiness, we know that this is likely a picture—a metaphor—depicting our lives in Christ since ***1 Peter 1:15-16*** makes it clear that we are to be Holy as He is holy and ***Ephesians 4:24*** says that we have a new nature that is like His: righteous, holy, and true. Further, ***Zephaniah 3:11*** makes it clear that this Temple is occupied by those who trust in the name of the Lord, which is an accurate description of those who have made the choice to live as aliens and strangers in this world. I think our passage in ***1 Peter*** gives a possible understanding, through a spiritual lens, of that confusing passage in ***Ezekiel***. Again, this was just a side note.

Now our membership in this holy priesthood is not just to be understood as some cool metaphor. Rather, God takes this very seriously; therefore, it is to be understood as an identity that requires choices and actions that are befitting a priest of the Lord. We are His ambassadors; we are set apart from all others; and this is not something we are to neither neglect nor abuse. ***Malachi 2*** speaks to the

priesthood and I want you to understand God's heart here; it is very similar to the message He communicated to us through our study in the book of *Haggai* (which we must NOT forget).

Malachi 2:1-9

"Listen, you priests—this command is for you! Listen to me and make up your minds to honor my name," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "or I will bring a terrible curse against you. I will curse even the blessings you receive. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you have not taken my warning to heart. I will punish your descendants and splatter your faces with the manure from your festival sacrifices, and I will throw you on the manure pile. Then at last you will know it was I who sent you this warning so that my covenant with the Levites can continue," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

The purpose of my covenant with the Levites was to bring life and peace, and that is what I gave them. This required reverence from them, and they greatly revered me and stood in awe of my name. They passed on to the people the truth of the instructions they received from me. They did not lie or cheat; they walked with me, living good and righteous lives, and they turned many from lives of sin.

"The words of a priest's lips should preserve knowledge of God, and people should go to him for instruction, for the priest is the messenger of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. But you priests have left God's paths. Your instructions have caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the covenant I made with

the Levites," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me but have shown favoritism in the way you carry out my instructions."

Just like the earlier passage in **Malachi 3** regarding the sacrifice of our tithes and offerings, the Lord is dead serious about His either coming against us or being the force of powerful and sustained blessing. It is up to us to shed the mantle of shame, reject the ethic of our goodness, and trust in Him completely relying on His goodness so we can be those priest that others come to for the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The purpose of His covenant with us is to bring life and peace in our lives and to use us as an instrument to bring life and peace to others. But it requires us to have reverence, to fear the Lord, and thereby choose obedience. He wants us to let His goodness be our goodness otherwise like the priests of old we will lie, cheat, live in hypocrisy, malice, deceit, and fail to lead people down the proper paths; and, yes, we will cause many to stumble into sin. Lord, may it never be. We are to pass on to others the truth and instruction we have received from the Lord, which means we must live that truth; otherwise we will be fake, false, hypocrites. Our words are to preserve the knowledge of God for we are messengers of the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

The curse He speaks here for failing to love His people in this manner is so similar to the curse we have experienced and which God fully explained to us in **Haggai**. He warned us and He wants us to take His warnings to heart. He does not want us to languish here and go back and forth between our goodness and His goodness, between obedience and disobedience, between the fear of the Lord

and the fear of man. He wants all our fight to stop and He wants us to embrace our job and our role on this earth as His messengers, His ambassadors, His priests.

Consider this warning: "I will curse even the blessings you receive. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you have not taken my warning to heart. I will punish your descendants and splatter your faces with the manure from your festival sacrifices, and I will throw you on the manure pile. Then at last you will know it was I who sent you this warning so that my covenant with the Levites can continue," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies."

The quip about splattering our faces with the manure from our festival sacrifices means that He does not care about our religious activities and offerings, He does not care about our pretense of being godly, He not care about our self-righteous justification of all we do; He is not impressed that we meet with others and let them tell us the truth; He is not impressed that we go to prayer and come here on Sundays, He will mock us with these very things. The Father desires our hearts, He desires our lives, and He desires us to live as sons of God trusting Him with our very lives; and He is very insistent that we join Him in this quest. Thus, He calls to us to repent, to take up our mantle of this holy priesthood and offer up these spiritual sacrifices.

Malachi 3:6-7

I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to

you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

For all those who make the choice to return to Him, to live as an alien on this earth, to take up the mantle of His holy priesthood, He will bless their lives and they will know more and more and more of Him. Let's always remember that we have been chosen, we have been plucked out from among the dead, we have been given eternal life, we have been given salvation, and daily the Father is working out that salvation in our lives. We have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, sprinkled with Jesus' blood, and we have been made holy. We have been born again of imperishable seed and have been redeemed from the worthless inheritance of our forefathers.

Even the prophets of old served us for without us they could not be made perfect; likewise, the angels serve us and do not even fully comprehend the grace that has been poured out on our lives. We have been given the eternal word that endures forever, drunk the pure milk of the Word, and tasted of the kindness of the Lord. And we can throw ourselves upon Jesus trusting that we will not be put to shame for He will purify us and remove anything within our being that keeps us from embracing our role as His holy priests who are to be busy offering up spiritual sacrifices on behalf of others. We are the Lord's ambassadors and our job is to plead with people to be reconciled with God giving them an example to follow; a well trod pathway that they can easily traverse.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, 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; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

You see, the reality of our identity gets even better and better and better. We will stop here and pick up next week with **1 Peter 2:9-10** as God gives us even more reasons why we can choose to embrace our priesthood and live as aliens and strangers in this world.

Let's pray