

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Claim Your Royal Identity**  
1 Peter 2:4-10  
October 29, 2017

***Pastor Jeremy Mattek***

I'm Pastor Jeremy Mattek with Time of Grace. A couple of years ago, my brother and I were digging some post holes in my backyard. We were doing a large project in my backyard and it was a beautiful day. We started digging down for the first post hole. We needed to get four feet underneath the ground. We got about a foot down and we couldn't get any farther; we were hitting a rock. So we tried to dig around the rock so we could pull it out and we tried to smash through the rock so that we could break it into little pieces and we worked on this for 15 minutes, and then 30 minutes, and then 45 minutes, and an hour and we never got deeper than that one foot under the ground because this rock was standing in the rock. Actually, this is just a small part of it. It was getting in the way; it was a powerful barrier to what we were trying to accomplish that day. Eventually, we gave up; we weren't able to get through the rock. We hired somebody to come in with a very large machine that smashed through the rock and was able to dig the hole for us, which was great. But this rock was the source of a lot of pain; it had a lot of power. Something that looks small now but it was able to accomplish a lot.

Today, Pastor Jeske reminds us that the same is true of your life. How he doesn't intend that your life will be full of pain or that you'll be the source of pain but he makes the point that your life is very powerful. God designed your life to make a powerful impact on the lives of those around us. And today, he tells us what that is and how you can make that happen.

***Pastor Mark Jeske***

I want to talk to you a little bit today about the concept of priesthood, as we look back and see that this understanding was restored back to the church after it had been lost in the centuries of the middle ages. The Bible uses the word a lot in three ways. Way number one was a system that God set up starting at the time of Moses to have formal brokers or go-betweens between God and people. The second way in which Scripture uses the word priest is to talk about Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest, who ended the need for the priests of the family of Aaron. The third type of use of the word priest in Scripture is to describe not pastors of congregations, but to describe you! And if you're not careful and paying attention, that dignity, that honor, that solemn charge, that important job, that critical role, will be taken from you. Nervous and insecure church leaders will take it from you and do it in your place.

I'd like to invite you to take your Bible with me today and look at the center of gravity to one of the at least a half a dozen places in Scripture where our priesthood is described. One of them is already in the book of Exodus, even before the Ten Commandments were given. Three different times in the book of Revelation, you and I are called a "kingdom of priests." In other words, not only church workers, not only do we have priestly ministries each of us, but we're royal priests; we're part of God's heavenly royalty. We're part of the divine family.

Now in 1 Peter 2, it's a portion of God's word you need to know probably by heart. This is one of those places to spend a little time and get this carved in to your memory so you can carry it with you wherever you go because it tells you of your identity as a Christian and it also lays out your charter. If you want to use the terms of priesthood, it talks about your ordination to your priesthood and secondly, it talks about the ministry to which you have been ordained.

We might as well pick it up about verse four: "As you come to him," the image is now going to be used of rocks and stones, that's the first metaphor, but I want to start with that because it shows the centrality of Christ. "As you come to him, the living Stone," once you've been converted – however God did that, whether through your baptism or through the word – both have the power to convert; to turn people from dead to alive. From heathen to believer. From hell bound to heaven bound. However God did that, through word or sacrament, it doesn't matter how he did it. But the fact that he brought you to Christ as you come to him, he is a living Stone, which is a contradiction, isn't it? Rocks look dead, don't they? If you decide to trim a path in your backyard with a rock, a big rock, and you put it there, one thing you'll know pretty sure tomorrow when you get up is it's still going to be there. And unless somebody in your neighborhood really admires your stonework and steals it, that rock will probably be there until you finally decide to sell the house. Rocks don't move spontaneously. They're inert; they're dead. Jesus is a living stone. He's a rock, but one very much alive. "Rejected by men, chosen by God and precious to him."

But you're living stones, also, and he now talks about how we are being mortared into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. But I kind of like that metaphor of stones rather than bricks. You know, I don't mind thinking of us being built together into the church like bricks, but here's the problem with that metaphor: Bricks all look alike, don't they? Every last one looks exactly like the previous one. You and I are funky different, aren't we? Man, we look different, we talk different, we act different, we've got different experiences, different skills, different passions. We perceive things in different ways. All good things because God fits it all together. We're like body parts; no two bits of which are identical. Even our right hand and our left hand are not identical. And even the stuff you think comes in pairs are not even exactly the same because God loves diversity. So the cool thing about this metaphor that I really love is we're like stones – field stones, some cut stones, some rock face, some huge big old boulders and some little ones to fill in the smaller holes – but everyone has a value to get mortared in to build a great, big, beautiful house where the Holy Spirit lives.

So we are a temple of the Spirit. Personally, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. You're walking around like a little mini-church, like a little chapel on two legs, but corporately, together, with believers – and not just those in our denomination – but everyone who sees the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior is mortared into a grand, big old building. And our differences and all of the unique funkiness about us doesn't get in God's way. He uses it all for his purposes.

Now three powerful Old Testament Scriptures to pound home that idea of the centrality of Christ. Three quotes – one from Isaiah: "I lay a stone in Zion as a cornerstone." Cornerstones, we don't use those so much anymore but every old building in this town has got a cornerstone and that not only had a pocket inside carved out for a time capsule, not only does it have writing

on the front probably with a date, but cornerstones were big and they basically set true right angles for the rest of building. The cornerstone set the angle for the depth of the building, for the squareness of the face, and for the perfect 90-degree squareness of the rise and the cornerstone set the angles for the entire rest of the building for it to be true; it has to be true to that corner. If you pull that out, the building will fall down.

Another, he says, metaphor, this one comes from Psalm 18: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.” Another change of metaphor but same concept. An arch over a doorway or window has everything held together by that keystone in the middle; the one that’s cut with two angles. They set that in and then they can pull the scaffolding away and the arch will stay and you now have a pierced opening either for you to walk through or for light to go through. But if you pull that keystone, the entire arch collapses. Jesus Christ is like the keystone of our lives; you pull him out and everything collapses. No matter how much power or money you have, you’ll end up with nothing.

Last, he’s also an angry stone: “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” If he’s not mortared into your life as the corner and as the capstone of the arch of your life, that stone’s going to fall on you and crush you with judgment and that is happening – the day will happen soon.

Now, verse nine says, but that bad news doesn’t apply to you for your faith in the Savior has taken away your fear of being crushed by an angry second person of the Trinity. Here’s what you are instead; four splendid new metaphors. Are you ready for some new ones? Like you don’t have enough already? Here’s some more. Lap these babies up, my friends. “You are a chosen people.” Isn’t that a precious concept to be chosen? Doesn’t that make a girl’s heart feel good when the phone rings and some guys are chasing her? It makes her feel wanted. Man, when the phone doesn’t ring, it’s an emotional burden, isn’t it, when nobody seems to want you? You probably know people like that and that’s a hurt in their heart that never goes away.

“You’re a chosen people.” I pick you, says God. “You are a royal priesthood.” I’m going to come back to that in just a minute because that’s my main point. But let’s just look at the other bits here and then we’ll finish up on priesthood. “You are a holy nation.” You are a great, big aggregation of human beings and through the blood of Jesus, he looks at you as though you had never sinned; that you’re as holy and pure as Jesus himself. Why? Because of your awesome performance? No, because objectively, without regard to your performance, the Son of God gave you the washing of his blood. It’s called grace. And the Spirit objectively loves you enough to have spoken the gospel to you and you believed it. And the second your belief connects you with Christ, the forgiveness washes over you. So through grace and faith, you are as holy as though you are Christ himself. And you are part of a holy nation!

Third, you’re a “People belonging to God.” Everybody needs to belong. That’s why there will always be gangs. That’s why there will always, unfortunately, be social media until the end of time. We need to belong. Isolation is crippling emotionally. We need connectivity. Our world longs for connectivity. This is the ultimate connectivity. You belong to God, now and forever.

So let's kind of back up a little bit now and for my last few minutes, I just want to talk to you about what it means to claim your work as a priest or what that means; claim that identity. First of all, do not let the fact that we have group activities as Christians make you feel in any way as though you're a lower class or second class citizen. Not so. That is a horrible legalistic notion that, unfortunately, was around at the Pharisee's time and it's what sinful, insecure people do to seize on positions to make others feel smaller and make themselves feel bigger. In fact, you are no better or closer to God than me. You are no lower in God's estimation or rank. The words that come out of your mouth are no less powerful. When you and I quote a Scripture passage, your words carry just as much impact for the power really belongs to God.

The Bible says that God gave many gifts to the church. He gave apostles and prophets, he gave evangelists and pastors and teachers. It never says, "And he gave priests," because we have a Great Priest, Jesus Christ. All of you have a personal ministry. We're also part of a group ministry and here's the distinction; here is where pastors come in. I don't have any greater power or authority than you do, except in so far as when we act as a group so that there's order and not chaos, the group chooses someone to lead and be a point person. Not because these hands are the only ones who can baptize or because these hands are the only ones who can hand out the bread and the wine. It's so that we can manage our group time without a lot of chaos and fighting for the microphone.

But there is enormous amounts of ministry that go on on a personal level, as well, to which you have been ordained and to which you have been called as a royal priest. Your personal testimonies in the areas where you have relationships are extremely important because we don't – now, get this folks; this is big – we don't come here in this building in order to be the church. We're in the locker room at halftime! This isn't the game. This is our breather! We're here to get our owies kind of bound up. We're here to get taped up. If we've got a high ankle sprain, we've got to get taped up. We're here – if we've got some cuts or gashes – to get some, you know, Neosporin or whatever, put it in and get kind of bandaged up. We're here – if we got our bell rung out there – we're here to go through a little concussion protocol and check to see if our head's okay. We're here to talk over our strategy for when we go back into the game. Are you following me? Because you're not here to watch me do ministry. I'm just giving you a pep-talk to help you step into your priestly ministry, starting in about a half an hour. I just want to be a resource for you; to give you some training and pass on the wealth of what has been passed on to me. You sent me to school for quite a while to make sure I knew what I was talking about. But not to do ministry for you but to be an encourager, helper, and trainer to help do ministry with you.

There are all kinds of activities that take place outside a congregation and even outside a denomination. And sometimes, nervous and insecure denominational leaders want to put everything under their umbrella and control it all and that also is a subtle way of denying your priesthood. There are all kinds of community groups and small groups that people get involved in with people where they work or people in their neighborhood. Those are just as valid as coming to church here because the sharing, the listening, praying and sharing of the word has value wherever it goes.

And I want you to know that I trust you and Paul does, too. In Romans 15, Paul said, “I see that you are full of goodness. You are complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” He was not talking to fellow pastors; he was talking to the members of the scattered churches in Rome. I’m there to help you do ministry; not to do it for you. And your job is just to obey and keep the money coming in and show up; like just passively just react to whatever somebody else is doing.

There are also all kinds of ways for you to have your voice heard. In this era of electronic media – electronic media, man, your little voice can boom all over the world! And you can – your words can see print, you can have stuff published, you can blog, you can write for websites, you can use emails. You have a very important personal piece of the holy ministry to which you have been ordained as a priest. Don’t let anybody steal the dignity of your ordination and don’t let anyone steal away from you the work that God has given you to do. He doesn’t want you to be a passive watcher, but actively in the game.

I’d like to kind of conclude with a thrilling wrap up from the book of Hebrews. More than any book in the entire New Testament, the book of Hebrews explains the – how should I say this – the seamless continuity between the Old Testament and the New. How everything in the New Testament doesn’t replace or trash or push aside the Old Testament. It fulfills it! It’s like buds opening up and the blossom comes out. And the priesthood of Christ is described most fully in the book of Hebrews and its implications and you and I, as assistant priests to Jesus, now have our role described here.

This is just from Hebrews 10 and I leave this with you for your encouragements. So Coach Mark is now talking to his banged up players. Remember, it’s halftime but in five minutes, we’re going back out there for the next big important part of the game; the next two quarters. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.” Did you catch that? You may approach God directly; you don’t need a go-between. You don’t need a priest. Why? Because we are priests. We may approach God directly. Our denominational leaders and our pastors are our helpers and coaches; not a layer of bureaucracy brokering and we have to only go through them, like they’re the only authorized agents. We don’t need priests because we are priests. And Christ, our Great High Priest, invites us to come into the Most Holy Place. It’s the reason why the veil of the temple, the curtain of the temple, was ripped in two when Christ died, as though God was saying, “Come on in, now. Come on in, the way has been bought through the blood of the Savior.”

“Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, open for us through the curtain.” That is his body, the body of Christ, is our entry to the very presence of God himself. And since we have a Great Priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.” That’s a reference – the sprinkling – is both a reference to the sprinkling of blood with the little whisk broom made out of hyssop plant and also a little reference to our baptisms. It’s from a clear conscience, “Having our bodies washed with pure water;” a little allusion to the baptism that washes us clean. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” That’s part of your priestly ministry for you, in turn, to

be an encourager of someone who knows less than you; to be an encourager to someone who's more broken and hurting than you. To be a guide to somebody who's more confused than you. To be a lover of someone who feels more depressed than you. To give worth to people who feel worthless. To give hope to people who feel there's nothing good that's going to happen in their lives anymore. Who feel that they're broken and going down. To give a rebuke to people who are acting suicidally. To let them know that hell is real and that as hard as this life is, they're going to only make it worse by pushing themselves into the next phase without Jesus. "Spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. Let us encourage one another and all the more, as you see the day approaching."

This is a big deal. You and I can help keep this message going; to claim our dignity and claim our title with gratitude and pride before God. I am a priest of God. Through my congregation, in my individual life, I have a priestly ministry to make Jesus look good and to share good news for people who need it badly; that there is a Savior, a High Priest in heaven, who once bled to death for our forgiveness and now daily intercedes for us as our ultimate go-between and we may approach directly. For as priests of God, as royal priests of God, we can step right to the throne room.

This is a great legacy of the Reformation. Claim it so we don't lose it. In Jesus' name my friends, Amen.

***Pastor Jeremy Mattek***

I'm holding a \$20 bill and if I were to offer you this \$20 bill, would you take it? Probably, right? It's \$20; you can do a lot with \$20. But what if I were to take this \$20 bill and crumple it up? Now it's all crumpley, now it's all wrinkly. Would you still want the \$20 bill? Well yeah, probably. But what if I took this crumpley \$20 bill and I threw it on the ground and I stepped on it and I started rubbing it into the dirt so it was really, really dirty and ugly and then I picked it up and offered it to you. Would you still want the \$20 bill? Probably, because it's still worth the \$20; that's the value that has been assigned to it by the United States government no matter what condition it's in.

Today, Pastor Jeske reminded us that God has assigned a value to you. There are some days where you feel kind of crumpled up, kind of beaten down, thrown down to the ground. But the value that God has assigned to you through Jesus Christ is the value of perfect. Eternally priceless. You've been chosen by God. You are royalty to him no matter how you feel. No matter what this world makes you feel like. And how did that happen? Because our Lord Jesus came down to this earth and he was crumpled up on a cross and he was pushed down; he was thrown down into the dirt to give that value to you. That's the value that you and I get to live with every day and it's a value that you also get to share with your friends and family and all those around you.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father in Heaven, we thank you for the precious gift of - well, the gift of you calling us "royalty." We don't often feel like royalty. We can feel beaten down and worn out; the world doesn't treat us well. At times, they criticize us, make fun of us, shut us out, and sometimes we even look in the mirror. The weight of our sins is so big the reality of the mistakes that we've made and the people we've hurt is so heavy on our hearts that we don't feel like royalty. And yet, in Christ Jesus, that is exactly what we are. We are forgiven, we are chosen, we are lifted up and that is our reality. Our reality in Christ Jesus. The reality of knowing that you have a place for each one of us in your kingdom. Thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus, the costly sacrifice, which made that happen. And until we get there, open our eyes so that we see all those that are hurting around us, who feel down in the dumps, who feel sad, who feel like their life isn't worth anything. And help us to express this truth to them, as well, so that we can be the ones who will lift them up, who give them hope, who give them forgiveness, who give them encouragement. Who give them the ability to walk through life feeling like eternal royalty. The eternal royalty that we are through Jesus Christ. In his name we pray, Amen.

I'm Pastor Jeremy Mattek with Time of Grace and it all starts now.