

Session Seven: Gathered as a Royal Priesthood

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Preacher: Donnie Griggs

[0 : 00] Hey, welcome back to Gospel Growth.

This is One Harbor's Life on Life Discipleship course, and we're talking together about how disciples are gathered together by the gospel. And we've been looking at different ways that we see this gathering, the church, the ecclesia.

How do we see this? And every time we get a different glimpse of the church, a different picture or description, it shows us more of what Jesus had in mind for his church. And some of these we probably knew already, and some of these we didn't, or we just knew a little bit of.

But our goal was to kind of help you and to help us continue to get a full picture of what Jesus has in mind for his church. And so far we've seen the church gathered as a gifted body, as a loving family, as God's temple, as Jesus's bride, as Jesus's sheep.

And honestly, it feels like we're still kind of just scratching the surface of what the Bible has when it describes the church for us. But already, it starts to make sense verses like Ephesians 3.10.

[1 : 08] Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. It's through the church, the ecclesia, the gathering of disciples, that the wisdom of God, that the love of God is put on display.

And you really start to understand that when you see all these incredible pictures of what the church really is meant to be. And so if you started this journey with us and you thought a church was a building with a steeple and some stained glass windows, I trust by now that you just had your mind blown.

That's what happened to me. It took me a long time to kind of really get my head and heart around how much more the church was than I used to think it was. And it's what led to me wanting to give my life to it. So anyway, through the church, the ecclesia, the wisdom of God gets shown to the world.

And so we wanna keep seeing more pictures of what the church is. And in this one, we're gonna look at another one of these powerful pictures of the gathering of disciples. And that's that the church is gathered as a royal priesthood.

First time you heard this or hearing this, it's probably not gonna make a whole lot of sense to you. So I'm gonna try to help you with that. And I think there's some big kind of aha moments that'll happen as we go through this that can really change your life.

[2 : 16] First Peter 2, nine and 10. This is where this gets spelled out really clearly. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

You're gonna do that. Those of you who've been called out of darkness into the light are gonna proclaim how excellent he is as a royal priesthood. Once you were not a people, but now you're God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy, right? And so right away, you probably recognize and there's something that sounds special about that. And that's true. It was a special thing to be a priest. We see priests all throughout the Old Testament.

And these were the guys who were helping with sacrifices and guilt offerings and all these things were there to help keep the people safe when they sinned against a holy God. They were there to help show people how they could still be in relationship with God even though they had sin.

And it was through all these sin-atonement sacrifices that priests did and it was a special thing, right? And in the church, this is what's so crazy about that picture. It was a select group of people in the Old Testament, but in the church, we see that all of us are called to be a kingdom of priests.

[3 : 28] Listen to Revelation 1, 5, and 6. From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of kings of earth, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priest to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Jesus loves us. Jesus has set us free from our sins by his blood. Now, a lot of us know that already, but we don't read on and see that he didn't just love us, he didn't just free us, he made us something.

He makes us into something different, right? And he makes us into these priests that are there for God. We become priests of God, right? But the priests were the ministers.

And here's a big aha that it took me a while to believe for myself, but it's true, is that that means that every disciple is called into full-time ministry. Every disciple is called into full-time ministry, right? Now, before you all start handing in your two-week notices at work and applying for jobs here at One Harbor, what I don't mean is that every disciple of Jesus should work at a church. That's not what I mean.

[4 : 35] But this idea that some do ministry and others don't, and everyone else kind of watches, these people run around like sort of headless chickens, that's not really in the Bible.

That actually came much later. We won't get into the history, but with the Edict of Milan, there was this sense in which now there's a laity and there's these professionals, and the professionals do the work of ministry, and the laity pay and watch the professionals do the work of ministry.

And it made spectating normal for the church when actually, if you read the New Testament, that wasn't the case, right? We're kingdom of priests. Jesus' blood doesn't just free us from sin to leave us to go live for ourselves.

You know, no, no, no. It does more than that. It gives us a job, right? Every blood-bought disciple of Jesus has been called into ministry. If you have been saved by Jesus, you have been called into ministry, right?

And there's a more specific calling that would lead to eldership and things like that. But in a general sense, we've all been called into ministry. I love how Paul says it in 2 Corinthians 5, 14 through 15.

[5 : 38] Now, the love of Christ controls us. It guides us, leads us, it persuades us. Because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, Jesus, therefore all have died, and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who was for their sake died and raised.

Okay? Jesus died for us so that those of us who live should no longer live for ourselves. We've been left here on planet Earth for a reason, and that reason is so that we would be priests.

In case that's not what you really think Paul is getting at, listen to how he continues. He says that this leads to us being in ministry. 2 Corinthians 5, 17 through 20. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, so you're a Christian, you're in Christ, you're a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. He didn't just fix this broken relationship.

He didn't just reconcile us. He gave us ministry. He gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, entrusted to us this message of reconciliation.

[6 : 50] Therefore, Paul says, we are ambassadors for Christ. It's like it's God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. This is an incredible picture.

Paul's saying that basically the pastor at your church is not meant to be the only preacher of the gospel at your church. Those of us who've been called out of darkness into his marvelous light, those of us who are in Christ, those of us who he died for, we live not for ourselves, we live for him. And we now become proclaimers of his excellency. We become ambassadors. We become ministers of reconciliation. We proclaim this message of reconciliation. You and I are meant to be ministers of reconciliation, telling the world around us that a king, a conquering king is coming back, but he's made terms for peace.

And his terms are surrender. Surrender to him and trust in him. He loves you, right? Now, a couple of thoughts on this. Firstly, we need to be equipped for ministry, right? You know, just because you're a priest doesn't make you a good one.

You've got to be equipped. There's training involved. Things like this course are helpful. You know, there's books and studying the word and all kinds of things can be really helpful for you. But just take 2 Timothy 2.15 and just consider this.

[8 : 04] He says, do your best, Paul says to Timothy. Do your best, Timothy, to present yourself to God as one approved. A worker has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. So the idea is that we recognize, firstly, for some of you, it's like the first time you've ever thought, oh my gosh, I'm supposed to be doing something.

Well, man, you're supposed to be doing something and you're supposed to be doing something well. You want to be good at this, right? I mean, if you're going to be good at anything, be good at this. This matters at an eternal level.

And then the second thing I want you to understand with that is that Ephesians 4.12 tells us that our job, my job as like a pastor and our job as pastors, our job is to equip you for ministry. Our job is not to do all the ministry and you watch.

No, no, no, our job is to help equip you for ministry. We're doing ministry too. We're in this together. But my job and our job is to help equip you, which is really what's driving this course that you're on right now.

It's us trying to help you for ministry. So learn and grow and study and devote yourself and discipline yourself and read and do all those things necessary so that you can really be not just a priest, but a good one.

[9 : 11] The next thing I'll say with that is don't wait to start until you have all the answers. Because what it might do is create this sense of like a panic where I don't want to say the wrong thing. I don't want to do the wrong thing.

And so instead of you actually stepping out and trying, you'll just sort of say, well, one day when I have all the answers, then I'll tell someone about Jesus, right? That's not what the Bible is getting at.

In fact, you see these examples like this woman that Jesus meets at a well, she's a hot mess and Jesus ministers to her. She goes back and immediately begins to tell everybody she knows. In Mark 5, Jesus meets a man who's possessed by a bunch of demons.

He's in as bad a state as you could ever imagine anyone being. And by the end of the chapter, he's out telling everybody the gospel. It just is amazing how quickly people got sent into ministry when they encountered Jesus.

And so the idea is don't wait until you've got it all figured out. But man, know that you're gonna wanna grow and study and learn. And be quick to say when someone asks you a question and you don't know the answer, just say, hey, I don't know, but I'll find out, right?

[10 : 09] But don't wait till you have all the answers. No one but Jesus has all the answers. But we can start telling people how Jesus had mercy on us, right? And the last thing, the most important thing to remember about being a priest is kind of knowing our role versus Jesus's role.

And that's to remember that Jesus is our great high priest. This is the most important thing I can ever tell you. Being in ministry now for some time, the most important thing that I need to remember and the most important thing you'll need to remember as you step out and ministry and ministering to other people is that you're not Jesus.

I'm not Jesus. 1 Peter 2, 5, you yourselves, so you're a holy priesthood and you're offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus.

But what he doesn't mean is that we're offering sin-atoning sacrifices. We're living this life of worship, but we're not offering sin-atoning sacrifices. We don't offer sacrifices for people's sin. We point people to Jesus.

He's the sacrifice. Hebrews is brilliant on this. Let me just give you a couple of verses. Hebrews 4, 14 through 16. Since then, we have a great high priest. I wanna be good.

[11 : 16] You wanna be good, but he's great. You have a great high priest. He's the high priest. He's passed through the heavens. Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, but without sin, so that better than all of us, right?

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need. Here's the thing. We've got a great high priest. He's better than any priest ever was.

He's absolutely incredible, and the last thing you and I should be trying to do is be him, right? Our job is to point people to him. We have a great high priest, and when you and I, when we, and no one's gonna step out here and go, okay, I wanna go try to be a high priest, but what'll happen is when people start asking us questions and looking to us for help, you know, it's very easy to fall into the trap of trying to be Jesus.

We call that being a functional savior, where someone, you know, thinks they have a relationship with Jesus, but they really just have a relationship with you, and you're filling that void, and you know, some people love that.

I mean, that's called having a messianic complex. It's acting like the Messiah, wanting to be the Messiah, loving the feeling of being needed like a Messiah is needed, like a savior is needed, and we would just obviously caution you against that, one, because it's wrong, sinful to try to be Jesus, two, because you're not, and that means you actually can't save anybody or help them, and three, because it's really gonna hurt people very bad.

[12 : 43] When they put their hope in you and they see you, that you're not him, it's really gonna lead to just complete disappointment in their life, and a lot of people walk away from church and say they walk away from Jesus. They were never really following Jesus.

They were following some person who let them down, so let's not be that person, right? Let's not be the functional savior, we don't need to try to be the savior. We wanna tell people about the savior. I love how this hymn says it.

Before the throne of God above, I have a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on his hands.

My name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence to part. That's his confidence we have. Jesus is our high priest. He made the sacrifice in our place, and so our job as priests is to point people to that ultimate sacrifice, to point people to him and to trust in him ourselves.

As you get together in your groups to talk about this, I think one of the things I'd ask you to consider is, have you ever thought about being called into full-time ministry? And what I mean by that is seeing your whole life as ministry, seeing the different rhythms of your life, it's on you to tell these people about Jesus.

[13 : 52] It's not just on you to bring people to church so a preacher can tell them about Jesus. It's on you to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Talk about that.

Be honest about that. Share fears or concerns. Be honest about how you've handled that up until now. Have you kind of push it off on other people. Talk about times where you may have accidentally tried to be the savior or where you've done that with other people, you've put your hope on them.

This is a great chance to be honest and vulnerable and to talk and to pray for each other and then to thank Jesus for being such an awesome high priest. Love you guys. Hope this has been helpful. Thank you.