

The Priesthood of Humanity: Our Design and God's Storyline

1. Introduction

- a. To say that God is doing something unique in this generation would be a misnomer on one hand and a vast understatement on the other.
- b. The current global explosion of corporate prayer meetings and ministries, commonly referred to as a House of Prayer, is actually a renewal of both biblical and historical precedent that goes back thousands of years. The idea of God's people faithfully gathering to pray and worship together is by not a new idea, it is, as we will see, actually God's original idea.
- c. Therefore to say that the current global prayer movement is unique is a little misleading because what is happening is nothing new at all historically. In fact the opposite is true, what we see the Holy Spirit doing around the earth is actually quite ancient.
- d. However, the scale and pace of the growing prayer movement is unprecedented in all of human history. For the last few thousand years God has raised up pockets of corporate prayer and worship, some lasting a few years while others lasted hundreds of years.
- e. Never before have we seen a unified global movement of prayer that is sweeping across nations, languages, ministry paradigms, denominations, and just about every other cultural and religious barrier that divides the body of Christ in some way.
- f. Additionally this organic movement of the Spirit is centered not only on corporate prayer and worship in a general sense but the establishing of night and day prayer within cities and geographic regions.
- g. With very little human effort and coordination the Holy Spirit right now is sovereignly calling the body of Christ in specific cities and regions to establish incessant worship and prayer. You can go to all six populated continents right now and find 24/7 prayer and worship.
- h. All across Europe in places like Ukraine and Germany, and in the whole of Africa from villages to cities, and even in the Middle East in places such as Iraq, Egypt, and Israel you can find 24/7 prayer and worship going on and none of it is coordinated. Globally God is changing the expression of the Church and Christianity to one of unceasing worship and prayer leading to powerful evangelism and revival.
 - i. I was told this past December by a high ranking officer in one the leading missions organizations in the world that 20 years ago the missions movement knew of ten prayer ministries that were 24/7 on the planet. Today, a mere 20 years later, they know of over 10,000! And only 2 of them are in the U.S.
 - ii. In many respects the church of America is lagging behind in what God seems to be doing in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Although there are prayer ministries all over the country most remain very small and misunderstood by the larger body of Christ.

- i. The goal of the next eight weeks is two-fold:
 - i. Equip and strengthen our personal prayer lives
 - ii. Establish the necessity, glory, and power of corporate prayer and worship
- j. We will begin tonight by looking at the broad storyline of the Bible with the goal of seeing ourselves as part of God's divine plan from before the foundations of the earth.

2. In the Beginning - Our Original Design

- a. In order to rightly understand any created thing you must understand the creator's original intentions; you must understand the "why" behind the creation's origin.
- b. Without understanding the creator's original intent we will always abuse the creation. Sin is simply the distortion and abuse of God's creation. It is using God's creation to do something other than what it was intended to do.
 - i. To rightly understand any story you must first understand the context, the characters, and the basic premise of the story, all of which are typically found at the beginning of the book. These factors set the foundation for the unfolding plot which is full of twists, turns, and surprises.
 - ii. Therefore for us to rightly interpret God's story and our role in it we must go back to the beginning and understand the purpose for our creation. Let's start by asking a question:

"What did Adam do in the Garden of Eden?"

- c. If we start with a wrong idea about who Adam was and what He did we will naturally project that upon ourselves as Adam's descendants.
- d. I grew up believing that Adam worked in the Garden of Eden. I pictured the Garden as this giant park-like place and Adam as a glorified groundskeeper. He was there to plant, weed, and water the Garden.
- e. But the Bible is very clear as to why man was created in the first place and it was not to work in God's garden as a groundskeeper.

*"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and **for thy pleasure they are and were created.**" – Revelation 4:11 (KJV)*

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." – Romans 11:36

*"...yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, **and we for Him**; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live." – 1 Corinthians 8:6*

*"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. **All things were created through Him and for Him.** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." – Colossians 1:16-17*

- f. I like how the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it:

*“Man’s chief end is the **glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.**”*

- g. We exist both for the glory of God and for the enjoyment of God. We were created to give Him glory through praise and worship. But we were also created to enjoy Him, to find pleasure in our communion with Him just as He delights in us.
- i. A.W. Tozer reenacts the creation of man this way:

“Stooping down, He took up the clay from the bed of the river, shaped it and worked on it like a nanny bending over her baby. He shaped and formed man and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. God stood man upon his feet and said, ‘Look around, this is all yours; and look at Me, I am yours; and I’ll look at you and I’ll see in your face the reflection of My own glory. This is your end, that is why you were created, that you might worship Me and enjoy Me and glorify Me and have Me as yours forever.’”¹

- h. Man’s purpose and identity are both wrapped up in what we can do that nothing else in all of creation is able to do. We are able to gaze upon the glory of God and respond with loving worship. It was to this end that God created Adam and Eve and placed them within the confines of the Garden of Eden.

“God created man in His own image, and out of that flowed the marvelous dynamic of worship. Adam and Eve’s unique purpose in the garden was to bring pleasure, joy and fellowship to God, which is the foundation of all genuine worship.”²

- i. When we dig even a little deeper what we find is that Adam was, and therefore we are, created for a specific role that was to be the expression of our glorification and enjoyment of God.
- j. Adam was not the first farmer or groundskeeper, he was the first priest. Humanity, as we will see, was created to be God’s priesthood on the earth. As God’s priests man would both glorify God and enjoy His presence.
- k. To show this lets first look at the story of Genesis.

*“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **tend** and **keep** it.” – Genesis 2:15*

- l. The key words in this verse are *“tend”* and *“keep”*. The first verb, “to tend” is the Hebrew word *“avad”*, which is frequently used for spiritual service, specifically serving the Lord (Deut. 4:19) and for the duties of the Levites (Num. 3:7-8, 4:23-26).

¹ A.W. Tozer: *“The Purpose of Man”*

² *Ibid.*

- m. The second verb used, “to keep”, is the Hebrew word “*shamar*”, which is regularly used to denote observing spiritual duties or keeping the commands of God (Lev. 18:5). It is also used to describe the Levites who were charged in guarding the tabernacle from intruders (Num. 1:53, 3:7-8).
- n. Whenever these two words are paired together in the Old Testament within a fifteen-word range, they always refer to either Israel serving God in worshipful devotion or to the Levitical Priesthood serving God through their consecrated duties in the temple.³

*“And they shall **attend** to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, **to do** the work of the tabernacle. Also they shall **attend** to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, **to do** the work of the tabernacle.” – Numbers 3:7-8*

*“Nevertheless I will make them **keep** charge of the temple, for all its **work**, and for all that has to be done in it.” – Ezekiel 44:14*

- o. Therefore, we could rightly interpret Adam’s function in the garden was to keep the commands of the Lord through priestly duties and to guard the meeting place of God and man from anything and anyone unholy.
- p. Interpreting Genesis 2:15 this way also highlights the already known and common truth that humanity was created to serve God, not the ground.

“This would be the intended meaning of the text, not, as some suggest, an implication drawn from the original meaning of working the ground. They had a covenant of service or works with God that they were to fulfill. And because such a spiritual service (“serving”) anticipated the forces of evil that were about, obedience to the Lord (“keeping”) was absolutely essential. After the Fall the spiritual service would include atonement, purification, reconciliation, and instruction in holiness.”⁴

- q. This interpretation is further solidified when we consider the fact that after Adam sinned his punishment from God was to work the ground as a farmer.

*“**Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.**” – Genesis 3:17-19*

- r. If we view Adam as a farmer who worked the ground in Genesis 2:15 than this curse from God after sin makes no sense. Adam’s curse to toil in the ground was a result of

³ Allen Ross: “*Recalling the Hope of Glory*”

⁴ *Ibid.*

- sin and therefore was not his primary function in the garden before the fall. To read the text this way would be hermeneutically incorrect and illogical.
- s. Adam, not able to perform his duties to the fullest by himself, was given a “helper”. This is not an ambiguous term meant to enslave woman to man. Rather a glorious and liberating identity for all women; that they were created as “helpers” in divine and holy service to God next to her counterpart.
 - i. Women are not just the producers of natural life but eternal and spiritual life as well. They bear the same image of God and function under the same banner of priesthood as man.
 - ii. Together, man and woman, Adam and Eve, are equipped to carry out the priestly calling of humanity upon the earth.
 - t. Among the clearest pictures of Adam’s priestly role in the entirety of Scripture is found in the lamentation of Ezekiel against the king of Tyre in chapter 28. In his lamentation Ezekiel draws upon the story of Adam in the garden and his subsequent fall to describe the current situation of the land of Tyre.
 - i. Norman Habel, in his detailed article *“Ezekiel 28 and the Fall of the First Man”* translates the relevant text this way based on the Hebrew used.

“Then the word of Yahweh came to me: ‘Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, ‘Thus say the Lord, Yahweh: You were a perfect signet, filled with wisdom and flawless in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; all the precious stones adorned you (carnelian, topaz, jasper, chrysolite, beryl, and onyx; sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald); your ornaments were wrought in gold, and your own engravings. On the day you were created they were made. With an anointed guardian cherub I appointed you. You were in the holy mountain of God; you were walked among the stones of fire. You were blameless in your way from the day you were created until a sin was found in you. Through the abundance of your wealth you became filled with violence and you sinned. So I rejected you from the mountain of God as a profane thing, and guardian cherub banished you from among the stones of fire.’” – Ezekiel 28:11-16⁵

- ii. It should be noted that commentators are split in how to interpret this portion of Scripture. Some believe it refers to Adam (as I do) while others believe it applies to Lucifer’s fall. We don’t have time to get into all of those details now so for this teaching we will accept the view that it speaks of Adam before he sinned.
- u. A few noteworthy things to see in these verses that speak of Adam’s priestly role in the Garden of Eden.
 - i. In verse 12 we are told that the figure in view was the “seal of perfection” and “perfect in beauty”. As the only created being bearing the image of God Adam was the height of God’s created beauty, second only to God Himself.
 1. Nowhere in Scripture is Lucifer described in this way at all. And surely he would not be considered the seal of God’s perfection upon the earth

⁵ Norman Habel: *“Ezekiel 28 and the Fall of the First Man”*

- when he does not bear the image or likeness of God.
- ii. In verse 13 is possibly the most remarkable of all the verses in the lamentation. The figure is described as being in Eden, "the garden of God".
 1. Again nowhere in Scripture is Lucifer described as being placed in the garden. The only account we have of him being there is Genesis 3 when he is clearly not authorized to be there.
 - iii. Also in verse 13 Adam, we are told, is covered with various gems and stones. The nine stones listed are nine of the twelve stones that later adorned the breastplate of the high-priest as described in Exodus 28:17-20.
 1. In the Septuagint all twelve of the gemstones that comprised the high priest's breastplate are listed.
 - iv. Lastly in verse 13 we see Adam being adorned with different musical instruments, mainly timbrels and pipes.

"The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created." – Ezekiel 28:13

- v. From the very beginning we see that man has been a musical being. Adam, on the day he was created, was adorned with high-priestly gemstones and given musical instruments to minister to God.
- w. Adam was a priest in the Garden of Eden. And like him we are also priests unto God so that He might be glorified in and through us and that we might enjoy His presence forever.

3. A Priestly People - From Adam to Moses

- a. A brief overview of the generations following Adam and Eve also describe men and women operating in the function of a priest (one who ministers to God) even though this is long before the priesthood would officially be established through Moses.
 - i. The first generation:

"Then men began to call on the name of the Lord." - Genesis 4:26

- ii. Enoch:

"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." - Genesis 5:24

- iii. Noah:

"Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma." - Genesis 8:20-21

iv. Abraham:

“And there he built an altar to the Lord, who appeared to him...there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord” - Genesis 12:7-8

“Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.” - Genesis 18:22

v. Isaac:

“So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well.” - Genesis 26:25

vi. Jacob:

“Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.” - Genesis 28:18

“Then God went up from the him in the place where He talked with him. So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and her poured oil on it.” - Genesis 35:13-14

“So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.” - Genesis 36:1

- b. This brings us to the life of Moses. Brought up in the Pharaoh's palace it wasn't until Moses was grown that he discovers his heritage as an Israelite. Upon discovering this news Moses murders an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a fellow Hebrew.
- c. Forced to flee into the wilderness we begin to see God sovereignly working in the life of the future deliverer by bringing him into the house of the priest Reuel (Jethro) whose name means “friend of God”.

*“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, **the priest of Midian.**” - Exodus 3:1 (cf. Exodus 2:16-25)*

- d. While tending the Jethro's flocks in the wilderness Moses first encounters the Lord in a burning bush atop Mount Horeb (Exodus 3:1-3)
- e. During this encounter the Lord gives Moses a specific command concerning the Hebrew people that he was being sent to.

*“So He said, ‘I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, **you shall serve God on this mountain.**” – Exodus 3:12*

- f. Moses was to bring the nation back to that very mountain so that they could have a corporate encounter similar to the personal encounter Moses just. Upon arriving at Mount Sinai the Lord descends upon the top of the mountain in fire (just like He did with Moses in the burning bush) to address the nation.

*“And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and **brought you to Myself**. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. **And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.’” – Exodus 19:3-6*

- g. This marks a monumental shift in the storyline of Israel. Prior to this moment only a select few functioned in the identity of a priest. But here God peels back the veil just a little more. Priesthood is not only an individual endeavor for a select few but a corporate identity for all.
- h. God’s desire was for the entire nation to minister to Him and give glory to Him in their identity as a royal priesthood. Yet the tribe of Levi was selected to become priests in a *vocational way*.
 - i. Everyone is called to be a priest and minister to the Lord by identity but not everyone is called to be a priest by vocation.
- i. This is what the first four commandments were all about, God wanted a people who would worship Him alone.

4. A Priestly People - From Moses to Jesus

- a. For the rest of the Old Testament Israel is portrayed as God’s corporate priesthood on the earth. They were called as a nation to show forth the glory of God to the nations of the earth and they also were blessed above all nations to enjoy God’s word and presence.
- b. What we see play out repeatedly in the Old Testament is God continuing to call His people to take their place as priests before Him. The story of the Old Testament is the story of God raising up and establishing His people as priestly ministers who connect with his heart.
- c. Most people associate Moses and the Law (and rightfully so) but we often overlook the fact that Moses also established an order of worship that endured for generations and acted as one of the clearest prophetic pictures of the coming Christ in the entire Old Testament.
- d. This tabernacle and the worship of God continued until the days of David. David, maybe more than anyone in the Old Testament, functioned as a priest before the Lord.
- e. He constructed a tabernacle in which singers and musicians ministered to the Lord day and night for over thirty years. (1 Chronicles 15-16)
- f. The nation was so transformed by David’s worship movement that kings to come

would reinstate Davidic worship in order to turn the nation away from idolatry and back to God. Over and over again we see God speaking to kings and prophets, calling them back to what David started.

- i. Solomon - David's son built the temple which allowed Israel to continue to operate as a corporate priesthood. (2 Chronicles 5:11-14)
 - ii. Jehoshaphat - He reestablished the priests and levites, along with the worship of David and experienced a great revival in the nation (2 Chronicles 19:8, 2 Chronicles 20:21)
 - iii. Jehoiada the Priest and Joash the King - Together they torn down the altars of baal and restored the temple built by Solomon. Additionally they reestablished the worship of David and saw a great revival in Israel. (2 Chronicles 23:16-18)
 - iv. Hezekiah - Immediately upon ascending to the throne of Judah Hezekiah began reforming the nation and calling them back to the worship of Yahweh. And he like numerous kings before him reestablished the worship order of David as the focal point of his reformations. (2 Chronicles 29)
 - v. Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah - After returning to Jerusalem from captivity the very first thing they do after arriving is reinstitute worship according to David and begin rebuilding the temple which was destroyed. (Ezra 3:2,10-11) (Haggai 1:8)
- g. The pattern of the Old Testament is that every time God desires to reveal Himself or move in power He first reestablishes the priestly ministry. Every time God wanted to move among His people step one was to call Israel back to their position as priests.

5. New Testament Priests

- a. When we get into the New Testament two of the first people we are introduced to are priests.
 - i. Zacharias - John's father was a priest and was used to birth the forerunner of Jesus. (Luke 1:5)
 - ii. Anna - A widow who ministered to the Lord day and night until she saw baby Jesus being dedicated in the temple. (Luke 2:36-38)
- b. In Paul's, John's and in Peter's writings we see that every individual believer is a priest before the Lord and that the Church as a whole is now called a corporate priesthood just like Israel was in the Old Testament.
- c. In fact to illustrate and communicate this truth Peter quotes Exodus 19.

*"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, **a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." - 1 Peter 2:4-5*

*"But you are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." - 1 Peter 2:9*

- d. By quoting Exodus 19 Peter's point is abundantly clear, the Church is God's new royal priesthood on the earth that was created by Him for His glory and His pleasure.
 - i. What is important to remember in both Exodus and Peter the authors are speaking in a corporate reality not an individual one. Yes it is true that we are priests individually but also equally true is that we are not priests alone but are part of a larger priesthood.
- e. Paul puts it this way:

"...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." - Ephesians 3:19-22

- f. John, in the Book of Revelation, bears witness to this reality in his opening exhortation the churches in Asia Minor.

*"To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and **has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**" - Revelation 1:5-6*

- g. Finally, in the Book of Revelation we see that not only are we priests here and now but we will be a "royal priesthood" for eternity as we stand before God in the Heavenly Temple singing songs of praise and adoration to Him.

*"Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and **have made us kings and priests to our God;** and we shall reign on the earth.'" - Revelation 5:8-10*

- h. The priesthood of humanity is something that should be seen on the grandest scale. Tracing all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and continuing into eternity after Christ returns to the earth and the New Jerusalem rests upon the earth once again.
- i. From beginning to end the occupation of man is clearly declared; we are a royal kingly priesthood, made to gaze upon the beauty of God and respond in declarative worship and praise.

6. The House of Prayer

- a. From the revelation of our original design and our corporate identity as priests before God we can easily see the reason and necessity for the House of Prayer. If we truly are priests before God called to minister to Him and enjoy His presence than the most

- natural thing to do would be come together as a local priesthood to worship and pray.
- b. The House of Prayer, biblically speaking, is not a method or a model of some kind. Many people hear that term and simply think of a particular organizational structure. Just like when we hear the term “church” many people think of a building with Sunday morning services.
 - c. But the House of Prayer is not a structure or method. It simply refers to our gathering together as priests; it is a value system that puts ministering to the Lord first before anything else.
 - d. Man was always intended to stand before the Lord and minister to Him. We were not primarily created to work, play, or accumulate goods for our pleasure. Humanity was created for God’s glory and pleasure, and unless we walk according to our original design first, nothing else will make sense.

“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.” - Psalm 27:2

“My house shall be called a house of prayer...” - Matthew 21:13