

The Jewish Calling, The Priesthood, and Separation

I am very honored to speak with you today, and every chance to communicate God's Word is an honor before Him. I was told I could say something about my Jewish heritage today, and I will, but first let me remind you that my responsibility is to speak the truth, and not to make anyone here feel comfortable, because the Lord God IS truth and I would have to lie to make your feelings more important than His Word.

Someone once asked me – if you're a Jew how come you don't wear a little cap – and I answered – being a Jew does not mean wearing a little cap. That is an old custom, but it was not even a universal custom in Jesus's day, and was just beginning. In the Torah, the first revelation God gave to Israel, the only person instructed to wear a headcovering was the high priest, and that was a kind of turban. So it is a Jewish custom, but like most, came along later over time. I don't wear a *kipa*, or *yarmulke*, since Apostle Paul -- himself a Jew -- instructed men to pray and worship with their head uncovered. That is divine revelation. So I respect it.

I do keep some Jewish custom, such as traditional prayers like the *Shema* – “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One” -- and some of the traditional days, such as *Purim* -- the feast of Esther. I sing *Shalom Aleichem* on the Sabbath, and my wife lights the Sabbath candles, as has been done for centuries, but is far from mandatory or biblical. It's just a custom. It's surface Judaism. There's nothing wrong with it. But it's not at the core of the Jewish identity.

The core identity of Judaism goes back to God's calling to Israel to be a nation, and to be a priestly nation. There's much to say about this, but I will only mention God's calling to Abraham and the priesthood. God calls his servant *Avraham*, promising him: *I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.* There is a universal mission here, of being a defined people, and in blessing all the nations of the world.

God also called the Jewish people to be a priestly nation, to intercede not just for its own sins but for the sins of the world. Among many passages, we see the early priesthood in Exodus 40 “*You shall put the holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. And you shall bring his sons and clothe them with tunics. You shall anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may minister to Me as priests; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.*” This is the inception of the Levitical priesthood, and there were no little caps necessary, rather, many regulations for running the Tabernacle and the Temple.

Israel made many sacrifices, sacrifices for the priests themselves to be clean, sacrifices for the individual, for the nation, and finally as I said, for the whole world.

This true mission of the Jewish people, although countless Israelites failed at it, was to find its full fruit in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It also finds its fruition in us. For the Church, the New Covenant family of God, is little more than that true, living, faithful seed of Israel which continued in Messiah. The promises, the covenants, the commandments continue in Him and through us, His Church. That's why apostle Paul, who was a highly trained rabbi, speaks of Christians as true Israel: *For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac [Yitzchak] your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.* (Romans 9:6-8)

That's also why Paul writing to the Ephesians speaks to the flock as if they were Jews: *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* (Ephesians 3:19) He does not just compare them to Jews, but refers to them as fellow citizens.

Likewise, all over the book of Hebrews, we see a continuing priestly role, albeit of a new level of priesthood: *Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.* (Hebrew 13:12-15) Therefore, the Jewish priestly role continues in Christ. In us. In you. In me.

That continuing role of priest is why the New Testament teaches in abundant and powerful language, our need to be separate from the world and separate from sin. It even tells us that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy – an enemy – of God (James 4:4). The holiness required to represent Christ, be emissaries of Christ, is one that requires a special walk. It's a special role, so it is a special walk. The average Orthodox Jew today shows fastidiousness in being ritually pure from certain foods or certain activities. They cannot walk more than a mile on the Sabbath. They cannot shake hands with someone ritually impure. The New Covenant Jew also has a mission of purity, but not a mission connected to those rituals. It is a mission of staying away from spiritual impurity for the sake the Christ: In Hebrew Christ is *Mashiach*. From which we get Messiah. Uplifting *Mashiach* for the world, uplifting His intercession, requires being separate from all that gets in the way. *"Do not be conformed to this world,"* teaches Paul, *"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

It is hard to define exactly what “worldliness” is. At its basic level, it means being like the world and not like the image of *Mashiach*, of Christ. But what does that really mean? To be a little more detailed, the best definition of “worldly” I have heard is this: Anything that makes sin look normal, and the Word of God seem strange. Let me repeat that: Anything that makes sin look normal, and the Word of God seem strange. That’s worldly. That’s what the New Covenant priest, the new Jew should stay far away from. It will take His priestly mission from its goal.

One of the best ways to keep wordiness out of our life and soul, is to wholesale ditch most popular entertainment. It sounds like a shock to some, but it’s a lot easier than it seems. I could not recommend it more strongly. Chuck out the TV. If you use your phone like a TV, then don’t. Or just get a flip phone. Chuck out the radio, except perhaps to wake up in the morning. The amount of peace in your mind, time in your life, and freedom of heart to lift up Messiah that you will have is truly incredible. Tossing out popular entertainment will set you free to serve Christ, and be an example of purity to the world.

A lot of people think – as long as it’s not clearly promoting sin, then it’s alright for the Christian. This is wrong. Perhaps the biggest lie ever pulled over on Christians in America, and on other well-meaning people, is that we can drink in the popular culture like water, as long as doesn’t have sex or violence. That is false. We should not drink it in regardless. This is because even if it does not contain those two things, it still does plenty to crash the ships of our voyage, and leave us stranded on the proverbial rocks. Number one, popular entertainment is a massive time waster. I hate to think about what it would add up to if we counted the time wasted in front of a screen even in a single year. It’s like your lifespan just got shortened. Number two, its designed purpose is often to indoctrinate, to fill the mind of the audience with its own worldview and false teachings. It teaches doctrines. Countless Christians have absorbed the philosophies of man, rather than the truth of God, by passively receiving pop culture. Their thoughts have been shaped, their language formed, the things they look up to or look down on decided by a non-Christian culture. This should be no surprise. It is what much culture is carefully designed to do. On top of that, the bulk of the culture either treats immorality like normal or openly celebrates it. It uplifts lewdness, uplifts fornication, uplifts sodomy and same-sex marriage. All the three major sports in America do this. The major sports networks do this. Why a Christian would want to help pay the salaries of men who promote such evil I don’t know, much less why they would want to absorb those things into their soul through their eyes and ears.

For those three reasons and more, I believe it’s clear that in seeking to be a holy nation, to offer up our lives as a sacrifice, we do not passively absorb a heathen worldview and its values. I do not know anyone who is a mighty servant of God – not one -- who has more than a very minimal connection to the pop culture. I do however know many professed Christians who have

a weakened witness because of a massive connection to worldly entertainment. This is the powerful trend. You will not see many people advancing in holiness by filling their minds with these things.

And I do not only want to warn you against the worldly TV shows, movies and songs. Video games cause much the same destruction to the Church; they turn it into a shipwreck. I do not only speak of the violent games, but of video games in general, which clearly bend the will and control the will in much the same way as drugs, leading their worshipper to spend hours and hours trying to advance in the game. That's what they are designed to do. We should have little to do with them, even for that reason alone. To be fair I also must warn against the vanities of the human heart. For even if we don't warp our soul with the moral perversions found in entertainment, we can take ourselves outside of our priestly role when the desires of our heart become our guidance in life. We should not be led by our desires. That's true even if the desires are not sinful; that desire to have a high level of education; that desire to have a wonderful career path; high salary; financial security; a nice vacation; to seem normal or be popular with our neighbors. If our worldly goals become what we put in front of our face and follow, we forsake God and we forsake our Savior, who died for us. The goals of the Christian are found rather on his knees, before God in prayer, and before the Holy Scriptures. It is in obeying God. Our goals then are submitted to God's will, completely. We are emissaries for *Mashiach* (2 Corinthians 5:20), for Christ, not for ourselves.

But having said a few big things the new priest must stay away from, what must the new priest DO with that free time? What must the new priest fill his heart with? That's an equally important or even greater question. For seeing that we have set off from shore and separated ourselves from the old life, there is much we must do to run this ship and help it reach its goal. There is much we can do to serve our Captain.

Firstly, fill your free time with a study of God's Word. Be on your knees with His Word, ask questions about it, seek answers about it. Learn God's commandments (which are more than ten), His nature, His workings for us through history which are all in the Bible. While we all need our time alone with the Scripture, it is also good so read commentators who offer insight from their own study and experience. Read what traditional Bible-believing teachers have said about passages. Read Matthew Henry or John MacArthur. Read the early Christian fathers, the early leaders of the Church the first five centuries after Christ. All of them will inform you, and grow your faith, in the time you might otherwise be staring at a screen, passively absorbing entertainment. Grow your faith through study.

Memorizing Scripture can be a part of that study, and one which instills the Word more deeply in our soul. One that helps us unite with God's supernatural character. It also helps with sharing the faith. Sometimes you don't have a Bible with you. Sometimes a person refuses to sit down

and open the Bible. If you have many verses memorized, you can speak God's Word directly to them regardless. And this isn't a kids club either. Anyone in this room is old enough to learn longer passages, even entire chapters. These you can keep in your mind throughout the day, and they will help you in all you do as you recollect them or meditate on them. Be reciting Scripture in your mind.

Likewise, your mind can be filled with the godly hymns of worship throughout the day. Colossians 3 tells us to teach and admonish one another "*in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" Learn the traditional hymns. Study the ancient art of chant, one which is powerful and seems to speak directly to the soul. Keep hymns on your lips and in your mind. Sing them to yourself and with your friends and family regularly. It is always good to worship the Lord in song. Hymns can also overcome fatigue, boredom, depression, lust, anger, bitterness and turn the eye of the spirit to seek the face of God. There are thousands of years of history to learn from in doing this. Even the Scriptures themselves can be sung. In the Orthodox and Catholic churches they still sing one of the most ancient hymns of the Christian faith – O Gladsome Light – which is from at least the 3d century AD. *O gladsome light, O grace Of our Creator's face, The eternal splendor wearing; Celestial, holy blest, Our Savior Jesus Christ, Joyful in your appearing!* How joyful to have that song on our lips as we go about our work.

You should also pray. A priest intercedes for people as a part of his job. The book of 1 Thessalonians teaches us to "*pray without ceasing*" and to "*thank God without ceasing.*" This is something we can do throughout the day as well. We can be constantly on our knees, and with a prayer on our lips. Pray for the Church. For your nation. For your school. For your family, friends and church community. Pray for our leaders. Pray for your enemies. Pray for our persecutors. Our great High Priest needs us on our knees, not pumping worldly music into our souls, of the kind celebrated at sensual parties or at pagan revelries. We don't have that spirit in us (1 Peter 4:3). We have the Spirit of God.

Learn from the saints, both past and present. Study the lives of the early Christian fathers and early martyrs for the faith. Men who took God at His word, sought to live for Him in all things, and built the Church in the early centuries. Learn from men like Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius or Augustine. Who is worth more to us, Origen, who taught the faith and wrote hundreds of books and was finally tortured to death for the Lord Jesus Christ, or some doped-up over-paid football player who fornicates for a lifestyle? Who means more to us? Who deserves the honor? Before a Christian can name a single sports star they should be able to name a dozen Christian saints, or missionaries, theologians, or martyrs.

It's true, there are a minority of pop stars who have a reputation for virtue rather than vice, but so what? If they are being virtuous, all they are doing is what every one of us should be doing.

They don't need to be worshipped for it. If you need an example of virtue in life, look to the saints of old, or look to someone close, in your own community, who is virtuous: a family member, a godly friend, a church member, or someone on the school staff. Learn from their behavior and values, not from a complete stranger who makes ten million dollars just playing a game. How about writing the missionaries your church supports. Tell them that you pray for them. Give them your support. Seek to learn from their hard work and holiness which doubtless serves the Kingdom of God and deserves our high respect. They will appreciate your letters.

Being rid of worldly entertainment and goals, also leaves more time to share the Gospel and serve mankind. In a church the preaching should be done by men, but in ordinary conversation it can be by anyone. You can hand out Gospel tracts. You can tell people you know of God's salvation. You might say – it's 20 degrees below outside with a foot of snow, I'm not going anywhere – but God gave us a gift called the internet. And if there is any use for it, this is one of the best. There are endless chances to share the Word online, or to bring apostates and heretics such as Jehovah's Witnesses, back to the faith. Do you have time to look at a computer screen? Then you have time to share God's Word. Moreover, in my fairly regular time online, I've run into a few people who confessed openly that they wanted to commit suicide. What better an opportunity to serve man than this, than to help a suffering soul? Isn't proclaiming God's salvation to the damned better than watching some half-naked singer yell into a microphone and dance around like a tramp? Isn't the opportunity to give someone help and comfort from their pain superior to watching a Hollywood movie which celebrates Marxism and uplifts the human heart as a false god? We should all agree that it is. Rush at the chance to do these things. And depart from the godless culture. Separate yourselves, for you are to be holy.

Lastly, the heart and life of the Christian can be full of Christ's life through marriage and the family. It is something God gives to us as a witness to Christ and His Bride, and to help us crucify the flesh. Many students here now are old enough to think of the family as something to be planning, not something far off into the unseen future. We should be excited even to think about it. The family helps us learn to live for others rather than ourselves. It helps us learn sacrifice on a daily level. It also helps the Kingdom by giving us the chance to raise up children to Christ. The Bible teaches that even a single believing parent can sanctify the child (1 Corinthians 7:14). What an honor, and a blessing to the Kingdom of God, that even a single child hears the name of Jesus and learns the law of the Lord. Just as beautifully, the family helps the man and the woman fulfill the natures which God gave them, the man fulfilling his nature through his leadership and protection of his wife and children, the woman fulfilling hers in her purity and submission to her husband, which BOTH reflect the Church itself. In these things alone we depart from the worldly and the common, and are trained to be priests of God.

I do not tell you these things today because it is the faith statement of my church. Or because it is the confession of my denomination. Or of my sect. No. They have nothing to do with a particular branch of the faith. I tell you these things because I am a Christian. This is what a Christian does. A Christian is called out to be a special people, and he is an enemy of the world. For he is a friend of God.

The apostle Peter spoke to his flock, saying: *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; who once were not a people but are now the people of God.* (1 Peter 2:9-10) This is all I am speaking about to you today. Peter was speaking to his flock and affirming the continuation of Israel's role -- in them. A Christian cannot do his job without living fully in that Jewish role, that of being a holy and separate people, and of being priests. We uplift the sacrifice of Christ, and make of our own lives a sacrifice. We intercede. We serve people. It's what priests do.

As I write this I remember that the Sabbath is almost over. It is the seventh day that God gave to His people right now. I think about the Orthodox Jewish rabbi, who could teach anyone a thing or two about holiness, but who literally spits or curses at the name of Jesus. I think about what the apostle Paul said about the purpose of the Church and of our faith: *I say then, have they [the Jewish people] stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles...For I speak to you Gentiles; ..., I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.* (Romans 11) The man whose fellow Jews nearly killed him many times, is teaching we should make Israel jealous for Messiah. They should be able to look to us and long for Him.

For the average Orthodox Jew today will still say – We WANT *Mashiach* now. But we can say something different – We HAVE *Mashiach* now. We have Christ now. We may not wear a little cap as our rabbi friend does, but if we endure we have a headcovering of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), and a crown of life in heaven (James 1:12). We have salvation. Part of what will provoke my brothers by the flesh to jealousy, is the witness of holiness of our Christian lives. The light of the Spirit of God. The rabbis will see that light not just in some little community, but across the whole world, in people after people who come to *Mashiach*, and whose lives are pure, inwardly and outwardly. Who love God's Word. Who pray for the world. Who serve others, especially the poor and needy. Whose manner is kind, spiritual, wise and gentle. Who produce families full of children reflecting order, joy and lasting for life. This is all a part of what will win the heart of my Jewish brothers. We need to have those things. It's not optional. It's our lives.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Romans 12:1-2)