

Good morning. The Lord bless you and give you peace. I trust that this weekend's opportunity to thank God for the freedoms that we have in this country led you to thank God for the greatest freedom that we can receive, the freedom of the soul from sin.

Before we set in on our message I would like to just mention a couple of items. The first is to encourage you to carve out time for our prayer times on Friday, either the 6:00 am time slot, or the 7:30 am time slot. If you cannot make those times, please let us know and we can facilitate another time slot. If the difficulty in our world, and in our nation does not move us to prayer, then I don't believe we are truly reflecting the Christian mandate to be interceding for those around us, as Christ does for us. Secondly, let us not grow weary in well doing. I know there is a lot of stir about what to do and not to do with COVID. There is a pretty wide spectrum of belief as to how to handle this. Wherever you fall on your particular perspective, just remember that we are called to love our neighbor, which includes bearing with them if they hold different perspectives than we do. Jesus sent Peter to pay a tax on His behalf, even though it wasn't owed, and that in order to not bring unnecessary offense. So if you are with people that are being more cautious, I think the Christian character is to respect them. They are created in God's image. If you are with people that are a less cautious, your Christian character is to respect them. They are created in God's image.

We have been in this section for sometime now, and I fear that we've only just scratched the surface of this passage. Because of that I have asked that three sermons from trusted theologians be attached to this link on our web page, <https://mywestwood.org/messages/>. I want to begin this sermon by looking at the response of a man that had achieved the highest honor that could be achieved in his society. I am speaking about David in the Old Testament. He did the shepherd turned king. His dynasty was generationally experienced, though after Solomon it was certainly curbed.

If you are familiar with David's life you will remember that it was a mix of amazing leadership and integrity, and amazing failure and grave sin. His life was both commendable and condemnable. God did not let David escape his sin, but God also blessed David for a life pattern of faithfulness. One of those commendable examples of David's life comes towards the end of his life. David's lifelong desire had been to build a structure for the worship of God. Up until that point the people of Israel were still coming to worship in a more nomadic way. The Tabernacle was essentially a really beautiful tent where people could come and worship Jehovah. David wanted to build a Temple, something solid and less temporal feeling, but God did not want David to be the one who would build the Temple. David could, however, prepare for the building of the Temple. So, David applied his leadership skills to prepare for the building of the Temple. He began preparing materials and setting up plans for the building of the Temple, and he would leave the actual construction to His son Solomon. Not only did David prepare to build the Temple, but He organized the priests within their duties (**1 Chronicles 22**). God had established that certain priests would serve in sacrificial worship, others would serve in the maintenance, others in guarding the Temple, and still others in leading singing, but it seems that it was in some disarray coming out of the time of the judges because David had to organize it. Everyone who served in the Temple had their task. But though the tasks were different for some than others, what was common was that they were part of the priestly family of the Levites. Only that family could serve as priest because God has established that this tribe of Israel would serve Him and the Hebrew people. All the other tribes had inheritance, but the inheritance of the Levites was the LORD, and all the service of the Lord. With that in mind, listen to what David sings in **Psalm 84:10** **"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness."** David had spent more than enough time in sin. He had tasted it; both the sweet and addicting savor of sinful pleasure, and the bitter and entrapping after taste of that sin. He was also experiencing the best that his kingdom had to offer. But what catches his attention with longing is the seemingly menial tasks of watching the door of God's place of worship. Why? David wanted to be as close to God's provision of His presence as possible. At the end of David's life was the more urgent call of His soul to give all up if he might just be nearer to God.

There is another story that I believe helps us get the emphasis of this passage in 1 Peter. This time we consider the New Testament. In [Luke 10](#) we read of a stop that Jesus made in a small village. He was welcomed into the home of friends, Mary and Martha, who were sisters. Luke doesn't mention Lazarus, probably because he wanted to focus on the interaction that Martha has with Jesus. In the midst of trying to be a good host and provide for everyone that came into their home, Martha not only became distracted from the real blessing of having Jesus there to teach them, but was a bit put out that Mary was not helping her serve. But Mary was quite content to ignore all the expected niceties of a host and just sit at the feet of Jesus to hear Him teach. Martha solicited Jesus to tell Mary she needed to help. After all, I'm sure she thought, we are loving our neighbors. Yet, Jesus told Martha, ([Luke 10:41-42](#)) **"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."** Jesus was not going to push anyone away from communing with Him.

This morning I want to transition to the second half of the sermon we have been unpacking for several weeks, and that and really highlight one simple but incredibly profound aspect of our responsibility. It will be a brief mention, but it underscores the ultimate heart behind these two stories, and that is that God is the gift. God is the ultimate treasure. How is that seen?

**.II. Responsibility.** Peter says that we are a holy priesthood. He says that we offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. That connection brings so much to mind from the Old Testament, which we will consider for a moment, but we cannot forget the biggest component of this great calling, and that is that the priests of God were constantly in the presence of God.

It brings so much to mind from the Christological teaching of the New Testament, especially as we see in the book of Hebrews. Priests mediate, priests share the teaching of God, priests lead worship, priests serve the house of God however it needs to be served. All these pictures we see in the Old Testament. Priests are held accountable for how faithful they have been to be true to God's teaching and to how faithful they have been to living lives of holiness. But I believe that the greatest underlying current that motivates us and challenges us is this, when the priesthood was established in the O.T., the priests were not given an inheritance like the rest of the tribes of Israel because **God was their inheritance**. This is the point that Jesus is making with Martha. This was the impetus for David to look at the tribe of Levi and wonder what it would be like not to have the responsibility of his kingship, but to simply be in the presence of the true King and Shepherd of Israel. The point of saying that we are priests is to underscore the greatest gift of the gospel, that we who repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our savior from sin are not just given eternal life as if it were some magical pill. Eternal life is the experience of being given God. For God so loved the world that He gave His Son, says Jesus. God is the gift. This is eternal life, says Jesus, to know you the only true God, and Jesus whom you have sent. ([John 3:16 and 17:1-3.](#))

One of the best illustrations that we have that speaks to this is the illustration of a wedding. We will have a wedding this afternoon, and we are so excited for this fine couple. Daniel and Caitlyn had planned to be married a few months earlier, but something called Corona got in the way. Here is a question that connects our ideas of weddings and what we've been saying. Why do we make such a fuss of the bride coming down the aisle, or why do we distinguish the bride in some special way in a wedding? The reason is that on top of all the amazing things that are happening on a wedding day, nothing compares to the true reality that the greatest gift any man could experience on that day is the person coming down the aisle to them. That is the point. God is the greatest gift!

If we are materialistically inclined, that is, if we are not spiritually minded people, then the thought that God is our inheritance is not that motivating. My friends, why do you really want to go to heaven? What is heaven for you? If it is not ultimately that we get to be with God, then we have absolutely missed the purpose of eternal life, which is to know God – know Him intimately in family relationship as our Father. It will miss that we are called to be eternally a nation of priests, ministering in the presence of God.

That being said, let me try and connect a couple of ideas from our text and previous messages concerning holiness and living with the goal of amassing rewards in heaven. We are called to be holy as God is holy. **Hebrews 12:14** reminds us that holiness is the means through which we see God. Several months ago, I mentioned in passing something to the extent that the angels that are in the presence of God declaring His holiness and are not doing so in an eternal state of monotony. God's holiness speaks of the fullness and distinction of His attributes above all else, and that those distinction and attributes are sinless. Further, we are brought in scripture to the reality that God is infinite. Consider, then, the concept of the glory of God and His infinitude applied to these angels in Isaiah 6. As they minister before God and declare, (**Isaiah 6**) "**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory,**" they are doing so because they are captivated by new depths of God's glory. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but that sameness is infinite. Heaven is an eternity of looking at something you thought you knew, only to find out that there is another infinite chasm of unexplored glory.

The blessing of the Christian life is that I can amass rewards that let me be eternally transfixed by some glory of God that I otherwise could not have experienced. The warning of this is that I can also rob myself of treasures in heaven that allow me to experience some glorious trace of God's holy attributes. If He is the treasure of heaven, and everything created displays something of His glory, then my rewards will help me appreciate more, see with more clarity, and experience something more of our God. Oh dear friends, let us strive not to rob ourselves of the beauty that God would show us in heaven. Fix your eyes on Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith that the eyes of you that might be enlighten and you may know what is the hope to which He has called us, and what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints. (**Ephesians 1:18**) If you are not a Christian I would urge you to consider the "so what" of life. What's the point of anything here if when this life is done there is nothing? We engage in this life to prepare for the next, and the life of Jesus Christ magnifies the glory that the next life will be if we are in Him, if we have received the gift of God that He brings, and it magnifies the horror it will be if we are not found in Him and He in us as our treasured possession.

The famous preacher George Whitefield (1714-1770) was a contemporary and friend of John Wesley shared a true Christian relationship with Wesley. They were of a different stripe in their theological convictions. Whitefield was what we would today call Reformed, and Wesley was what we would call Arminian. It is said that Whitefield was asked if he thought he would see Wesley in heaven, to which Whitefield responded, no, because he will be so close to God and I so far back. Whitefield understood the concepts that we are talking about regarding the degrees of reward and their relationship to God. He understood that the means of amounting reward is to use the provisions of our responsibility as priests to savor more of God. So, Peter says that we offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We praise God at all times because we dwell in His presence as in the temple and part of the temple of God. We work hard at personal holiness and shun sin not just because it displeases God, but because it keeps us from God, and God is our greatest treasure with whom we dwell. We shun sin not just because a priest is meant to mediate so that people find remediation for sin, but because people experience the mercy of God in the remediation of sin.

In a moment, those of us who are Christians will be asked to participate in the Christian ordinance of communion, or the Lord's table. Jesus speaks about these elements as being spiritual in nature, though His sacrifice was both spiritual and physical. What does this ordinance teach us? It teaches us that our life is sustained by God. It teaches us that our desire for God must be more than even our desire for food. It teaches us that of all the symbols that Christ could have left to honor God, He left us one that speaks of nearness to Him because His sacrifice brings us into communion with God through the forgiveness of sins.

Dear friends, are our pursuits in this life going to rob us of glories in the next, or facilitate our opportunity to experience them? Amen