

## THE PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Jn. 17 is the chapter that contains what commentators call *The High Priestly Prayer*. In this prayer the Lord Jesus speaks about Himself and His own mission in vv.1-5. He then begins to pray for His disciples, vv.6-19, and He asks the Father to sustain them during the inevitable opposition they would face and to keep them united, v.11 Holy Father, [*and there is only one Holy Father, - all others are pretenders and frauds*] keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. As He moved on through His prayer, He prays for you and me and every born-again child of God, *John 17: 20 Neither pray I for these alone [i.e. the disciples], but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

Do you ever consider how greatly blessed you are belonging to the Family of God? Do you often think about **the privileges belonging to God's people**? What would you be doing today if Christ was not your Saviour and Lord?

I don't suppose we would be in a church meeting, holding a Bible, and speaking about God Whom we love. We are all from different backgrounds and different interests ... I don't suppose, - if we did not belong to the Family of God, - we would be gathered in such a fashion as this. After all, what would you have in common with me, and what would I have in common with you?!

You may remember a few weeks ago I mentioned possible headings for a study, - **Sainthood, Priesthood** ... and Ann suggested **Brotherhood**. We belong to the oldest family, the most diverse family, the largest family ... and it is all because the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world and went to Calvary to pay the price to purchase us as His own ... and we have been 'born again' into this family of God

There are indeed *many* aspects we could look at as we consider **the privileges of God's people**, - perhaps you could think of them as you lie with your head on the pillow this evening before you go to sleep (Ps. 149:5 *Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds*) ... but let's confine our thoughts to these three headings ...

## **SAINTHOOD**

\* Ps. 16:3 But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.

\* The saints are on the earth, as well as in Heaven. ... When I was growing up I had many friends who were Roman Catholic, and they belonged to strict Roman Catholic families.

\* They celebrated the saints' days, and great mystery surrounded the lives of these men and women who were privileged with the particular title of 'saint'.

\* They often referred to the saints in their own homes ... they weren't embarrassed and I wasn't offended ... it was simply what they believed.

\* For many years though, I would have distanced myself from referring to born-again believers as saints because of my early experiences.

\* When I look up the dictionary I find a saint is described as "a person who has died and has been declared a saint by canonization".

\* However, the Bible has its own very different and very strict definition of what a saint is ... and it has nothing whatsoever to do with someone fulfilling a set of so-called canonical 'must haves' and 'must do's' to attain recognition.

\* A saint instead is someone who has uniquely been set aside by God. It comes from a word that means "set aside for a particular purpose".

\* When a husband places a ring upon his bride's finger, that ring sets that woman aside as belonging to him, and to him only, in all the matters unique to marriage. ... And women, you will be glad to hear when you place the ring upon your husband's finger, he is yours uniquely too. Both of you are set aside for a particular purpose, for each other. You don't belong to anyone else, - you belong to each other ... and that is what the word underlying 'saint' means.

\* You both belong to each other, and become one ... and it is God's purpose that your union would continue until only death would separate you.

\* The word then became the description for the believer in Christ, the redeemed child of God. In the Bible a saint is one who is "wholly consecrated to God" and has been born again of the Holy Spirit of God.

\* He/she is not attracted to follow in any paths that are contrary to the leading of God. He/she will only seek to live in a manner that is pleasing unto Him.

\* Sadly, it does not mean we shall never fall short in our obedience to Him, but we should work hard to make them to be the exception rather than the rule. Paul instructed the Philippians, 2:12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and he told Titus the same instruction, 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

\* The saint is someone who is set apart for the Lord and His Kingdom. The saint is one who belongs to God. Becoming a saint is an eternal work, and is dependent totally upon God's plan of grace in salvation.

\* This miracle all began with God. We were chosen by the Father (Eph. 1:3,4) in the great expanse of eternity ... and we knew nothing about it until it was revealed to us in the Word of God.

\* This election was not based on anything we had done, because we were not even on the scene! God's election was based wholly on grace ... and for that we praise and rejoice in Him!

\* The miracle of God's salvation then moved into time when the Holy Spirit began to convict us of our sin and ultimately bring us to faith in Christ ... and I recognised that Jesus died on the cross of Calvary to redeem my soul.

\* A wonderful and marvellous story ... saints are a people who have a definite and a different lifestyle. They have a unique conversation and distinct values. God never intended them to remove themselves from society, but our Heavenly Father calls His people to go *into* the world and make disciples (Mt. 28:19).

\* A saint is one who has Christ in his heart, in his mind, in his conversation, in his footsteps ... and in every part of life. A saint is one whom Christ has completely taken over and is honing and refining into the kind of person He wants that person to be ... and will ultimately become when welcomed into Heaven.

\* Yes, indeed the work God commences will be successful, [I Sam. 2:9 He will keep the feet of his saints](#). It was with this confidence Solomon prayed in the temple, [II Chron. 7:41, let thy saints rejoice in goodness](#). In other words, the Lord's people are careful only to behave within the Lord's favour.

\* He loves each one of them, and they can never be parted from Him, - not even death can destroy their standing as saints, [Ps. 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints](#).

\* ... And what does God want to hear from His saints? Certainly not moaning and complaining, [Ps. 145:10 All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. 11 They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; 12 To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom](#).

\* The saints are the collective body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each of them are His people. Each of them He has shed His blood for ... and He has an eternal love for them individually and collectively as a family. ... **Sainthood**.

## **PRIESTHOOD**

\* When God confers you with **sainthood**, He confers the **priesthood** upon you too. In fact, you cannot be a saint without being a priest, and you cannot be a priest without being a saint.

\* A **saint** is one who is saved, and a **priest** has been saved to serve. There is absolutely no possibility of being a priest who does not serve! Priests serve ... they do not *not* serve!

\* There is absolutely no Biblical comprehension of or no Biblical warrant for a priest who fails to serve! ... If somehow you managed to become a priest and you did not serve, you would not be a priest for very long!

\* The office of priest in the Old Testament was a privileged covenant relationship God had *only* with the children of Levi, [Ex. 19:6 ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation](#).

\* They were a people who were continually instructed to keep themselves spiritually clean, [Ex. 19:22 let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves.](#)

\* It was their sole purpose to live as unto God, - God's business was their business. It was their responsibility to 'mind' the things of God and see to it that His ways were kept before His people.

\* God had stringent criteria for them. ... When we enter the New Testament dispensation we discover that God developed these stringent criteria to encompass a new people, - people who came from both Jew and Gentile backgrounds. He did not diminish the special relationship, but instead He added to it!

\* In the Old Testament economy, *only* the high priest could approach Jehovah and *only* on the Day of Atonement. Through Christ's death on the cross He superseded the old economy and He replaced it with a new economy that allowed every born-again child of God continuous access before the Father ... so that in the New Testament all believers in Christ became priests. They were saved to serve in this holy capacity, [I Pet. 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.](#)

\* Every believer has the right and the duty to do God's work. Through the work of the Great High Priest on the cross we can approach God directly. The veil in the temple, - that divided the people from God, - has been torn down and we have ready admittance to come boldly and confidently before God.

\* He has saved us to become priests, - He has saved us to serve Him in that capacity, - [He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father \(Rev. 1:6\).](#)

\* In the Old Testament the priests worked within the confines of the Tabernacle area, they worked with animal sacrifices and the various ornaments and artefacts ... but Christ put an end to the Levitical priesthood and the Old Testament Law.

\* Today, under the new dispensation of grace, we, - as priests, - have only one task ... and that is to serve the King of kings ... it is to serve at the behest of the Great High Priest, and as the writer to the Hebrews said, [4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. ... Sainthood, Priesthood ...](#)

## **BROTHERHOOD**

\* Yes, the priests worked together under the direction of the High Priest. No priest was permitted to 'go it alone' or to cut themselves off from the other priests. ... There was a strict code they had to live and work by.

\* They shared the work, and they shared *in* the work. Let's immediately emphasise this in the New Testament. ...

\* When Ananias was told by the Lord to expect Saul of Tarsus, he remonstrated with God, [Acts 9:31](#) *Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem.* From the very outset, we see the brotherhood amongst the believers, - saints and brothers together!

\* Paul often referred to the fellow-saints as his 'brethren'. They came from different parts of the old world, and saved out of different situations ... and yet in Christ they were all 'brethren'. Christ united them and kept them united.

\* Now, having said that, unity among God's people has always been a challenge to maintain. If we don't get our own way, the unity can come under threat. We see it many times in the letters of Paul ... when he had to contend with warring factions ... and he had to tell them to [stand therefore](#) ([Phil. 1:14](#)), and to endeavour [to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace](#) ([Eph. 4:3](#)).

\* It was the prayer of Paul, but it was also one of the final great prayers of the Lord Jesus, [Jn. 17:21](#) *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.*

\* We sometimes shy off from these words because the ecumenists have hijacked them, but these are the words of the prayer of the great High Priest ... that His born-again people would be united in Him and maintain that unity.

\* I cannot go along with all the teachings of Pentecostalism or Presbyterianism, Methodism or Anglicanism, - I'm a Baptist because I believe in Baptist principles and in the Baptist Confession of Faith ... but when we all start off at the cross, recognising that Jesus died to take away our sins and to make us fit for Heaven ... I freely recognise that despite our differences on peripheral matters we have the saving work of Christ in common ... *and that makes us brethren!*

\* I'm not going to join their denomination, - as I would not expect them to become Baptists, - but the labels we set upon ourselves here on earth will evaporate by the time we have reached Heaven!

\* What matters is that together we know and love Jesus Christ as our Saviour, our Master and our Lord! It is not an 'open ecumenism' but a sealed work of the Holy Spirit Who has made us to be one through the redeeming work of Christ on Calvary.

\* So often the greatest way the enemy can do his work is to get God's true people fighting and falling out among themselves. ... However, the psalmist David declared, [Ps. 133:1](#) *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!* <sup>2</sup> *It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;* <sup>3</sup> *As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

\* It is one of the shortest psalms, and yet one of the most beautiful to the glory of God.

**CONCLUSION.**

\* **Sainthood, priesthood and brotherhood** ... Yes, of course, there are many ways to consider **the privileges of God's people**. I think it would take a long time before a study of all those privileges would be exhausted!

\* We are a privileged people, aren't we?! There is no more a privileged people on this earth than the people of God.

\* God knew us and loved us from before the foundation of the world. He had us all prepared for where He would place us in order to fulfil His plans for us.

\* His eye is ever upon us and nothing is permitted to destroy that which He has purposed for us.

\* He has bought us at tremendous cost to Himself, - the cost of His dearly-beloved and only-begotten Son.

\* He is precious to us, ... but also we are precious to Him, - each of us, and all of us!

\* We cannot afford to be without each other in serving Him, - we are all 'in it' together! I need you as much as you need me ... and we both need Christ, and to be faithful together with Him.

\* We haven't touched on anything deep or anything you have not heard before ... but it's simply a reminder.

\* Paul was zealous for these privileges, ... so zealous that he counselled Timothy, and us also, [I Tim. 6:20, O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.](#)

\* Yes, keep it, guard it, and hold on to it! It is eternally precious for each of us who knows the Lord Jesus as Saviour is here because of Him, and to each of us, - because of Him, - belong these three headings, **sainthood, priesthood and brotherhood.**

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