

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a day of corporate mergers. For those savvy investors among us, here are some possible corporate mergers to look for within in the next few months:

- (1) FedEx may merge with their competitor UPS. The new company will be called FedUp.
- (2) Knott's Berry Farm is thinking of merging with the National Organization of Women become Knott Now.
- (3) Zippo may merge with Audi Motors, Dofasco and Dakota Mining. The new company will be ZipAudiDoDa.
- (4) 3M corporation may merge with Goodyear to start a chain of restaurants called MMM Good.
- (5) Hale Business Systems may merge with Mary Kay Cosmetics, Fuller Brush Company and W.R. Grace. The result of this merger will be called Hale, Mary, Fuller, Grace. And finally, thankfully,
- (6) Polygram Records is considering buying Warner Bros. and Zesta Crackers. The new company will be Polly, Warner, Cracker.

Speaking of mergers, there is a takeover bid being offered at this time—and it involves you. The Creator of the Universe has tendered an enormous price to take over your life. It's not a hostile takeover. In fact, it's a loving offer. Jesus Christ, the Son of God has already paid the gold of His blood and the silver of His tears so your life can be merged into His. If you will accept God's offer, and give Him controlling interest in your life, you'll find there are fabulous dividends to enjoy. The moment you accept this divine takeover bid, you will start to live a life of peace and purpose.

In this series we've been discussing who Jesus is and who we are in Christ. Last week we looked at The Rock and Our Role. Jesus is the rock and we are the living stones God uses to build up a spiritual house called the church. The apostle Peter continues this explanation in our text today. Let's begin reading in I Peter 2:9-10:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (KJV "peculiar"), that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." As a reminder, verse 11 is the theme of the book, and that's why I'm calling this series "Aliens." "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires that war against your soul."

The age old debate between philosophers has been, "what's more important, who we are, or what we do?" In other words, is it more important to do or to be? Centuries ago, the philosopher Socrates said: "To be is to do." In the last century, the existentialist, John Paul Sarte disagreed with Socrates and wrote: "To do is to be." Who's right? I think singer Frank Sinatra settled the issue when he said: "Do, be, do, be do..." Later that funny canine philosopher agreed with Sinatra when he said: "Scoo be, do, be, do!"

Seriously, who we are and what we do are linked together. You can't be who you claim to be unless you do what you're supposed to do! But you can't ever do what you're supposed to do until you understand who God intends you to be!

The two most important questions you can ever answer are: Who am I? and why do I exist? We find the answers to those questions in this text:

I. Q: WHO AM I?

A: PART OF THE KING'S PRIESTHOOD!

In verse nine, Peter uses several different phrases to describe who we are. I first learned this verse in the King James Version which says we are a "peculiar people." When I read that I thought, "Well, that explains why there are so many strange people in the church!" But the word carries the idea of ownership—we belong to God.

The main picture here is that we are a royal priesthood. The word "priest" is from the Greek word *hierus* from which we get our English word "hierarchy." In the Old Testament there was a spiritual hierarchy between the priests and people. Only the priests could approach the altar and the Temple building. There literally was a wall keeping ordinary people away from the altar.

The book of Hebrews says Jesus has become our high priest. When He died on the cross, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holiness from the rest of the world was torn. God was inviting us to come into His presence through His High Priest, Jesus. In the early church, there was no hierarchy, and all the believers shared everything in common. But through the centuries, a division gradually developed within the church until once again the concept of hierarchy was re-established. There became a distinction between the priests—the professional clergy—and the ordinary people. Today, you can go into some churches and there is a rail separating the holy place in a church from the place where the ordinary people are—and only the "priests" are allowed to go back and operate behind that rail.

We maintain this false hierarchy by talking about clergy and lay people. But the New Testament teaches we are all priests. That's why I don't like the title "Reverend." First, no one should be revered except God alone. Second, that word is never applied to a person in the Bible. In Matthew 23 Jesus criticized the Pharisees because they loved to be addressed with special titles like "Rabbi" and "Father."

I've had people call me everything from Father David to King David to the Right Reverend Dykes—and I wince whenever I hear those titles. Often a new member asks me what they're supposed to call me. My usual reply is, "David." Or, if you prefer, you can call me "pastor" which is just my role in the Body. But puh-lease, don't call me reverend!

There *is* a spiritual hierarchy in the church you need to understand. You have Jesus at the top—He's the High Priest, the Head of the church. And then you have all the rest of us under Him. Got it? Other than that, there should be no hierarchy because we're all priests!

We embrace a doctrine called “the priesthood of the believer.” We don’t need any human middle man to conduct business with God. Through Jesus, our High Priest, we can approach God. But the concept of us being priests is always used collectively—never in a solo roll. If you think you can do the solo priest thing, you’ve missed the point. It’s not right for me to say, “I’m a priest.” But it’s correct to say, “We are all priests.” What’s the difference? I’m not operating alone, I need you and you need me. In verse five Peter writes that we are a holy priesthood. In verse nine he says we are a royal priesthood. The suffix “hood” communicates a group. I’ve got one biological brother, Daniel. If I introduced him to you, I wouldn’t say, “I want to introduce you to my brotherhood.” If I introduced you to Ron Donaldson, who lives across the street from us, I wouldn’t say, “This is Ron Donaldson, he’s my neighborhood.” “Hood” means you’re part of a group. Priesthood means we’re in this priest-thing together!

Now what do priests do? Priests build bridges. The Latin word for priest is *pontifex*—which means comes from two Latin words, “bridge” and “to make.” The Pope is called the Pontiff, which means “bridge to God.” Our High Priest, Jesus, is THE Bridge that spans across our sinful condition so we can be connected to God. We are under-priests, and we should be building bridges for people to know God as well.

Who are you? You are part of the priesthood. You aren’t some lowly cog in a spiritual hierarchy. You are a priest for the King. God loves you as much as He loves Billy Graham or the Pope. Turn to your neighbor and say, “I’m part of the ‘hood—the priesthood. You’re part of the ‘hood—the priesthood. Let’s build some bridges between God and man.”

II. Q: WHAT IS MY PURPOSE IN LIFE?

A: TO DECLARE GOD’S PRAISES!

The next important question is, “What is my purpose in life?” The Bible says in verse 9 we are to “Declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” I Peter 2:9 is one of the a few foundational verses in the New Testament. In the margin of my old preaching Bible I had written beside this verse “Why I exist.”

I hope you’ve read Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. In it he writes: “If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* His purpose and *for* His purpose. You were made by God and for God—and until you understand that, life will never make sense. Life is about letting God use you for His purposes, not your using Him for your own purposes.” (*The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 22)

God’s purpose for your life and my life is that we would declare His praises. Once you understand this, you’ll find that there is tremendous power in positive praise. Let me share with you four principles of the power of positive praise:

(1) Positive praise is offered in all circumstances. It’s easy to praise the Lord when everything is going well in your life. If you’re here today and you have a good job, a good family, and all the money you need, and you’re feeling pretty good, you probably don’t have any trouble shouting, “God is good! Praise the Lord!” But if you’re here today and you’re without a job, or you don’t know where you’re going to get the money to pay off your debts, or if you are

suffering some chronic pain, or if you’re marriage and family are in a mess—it’s not easy for you to say, “Hallelujah, Praise the Lord.”

But the Bible teaches whether circumstances are pleasant or painful, we are to praise the Lord. Remember, we’re priests, and one of the jobs of the priest was to offer sacrifices. We don’t offer dead animals anymore. Instead we offer the sacrifice of praise. Hebrews 13:5 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.” (Hebrews 13:15) Look at the first two words in that verse. If your life is in a mess, the only way you can offer praise is through Jesus. And praise is not something we offer once a week on Sunday mornings, we are to *continually* offer praise to God. Psalm 100 says we are to approach God’s presence with thanksgiving and “enter His courts with praise.”

Praise is the best way to approach God. When my daughters were little and I came home after work, they stopped what they were doing and yelled, “Daddy, you’re home!” Then they ran up and held up their hands for me to pick them up. They jumped into my arms and I’d hug them as they started telling me about their day. Man, that’s the greatest feeling in the world! Of course, they’re grown now. That’s one reason Cindy and I got a little dog a couple of years ago. Whenever we come home, Betsy, our Miniature Schnauzer comes running up—she’s happy to see us! She jumps around and barks—I like that. We all do. Why do we like it? Because God made us in His own image and He enjoys receiving praise and adoration from His creation.

When was the last time you ran into God’s presence and said, “Father, I love you! I’m so glad to spend time with you!” God *wants* us to praise Him even more than we want to praise Him.

I’m still trying to adjust to life without my friend Dr. Bill Streckert, who died on February 7. Gayle loaned me his Bible and on the morning of his funeral, God woke me up at 4:00 a.m. and I spent about three hours just going through Bill’s Bible reading all his notes and comments. One of his notes in the back of his Bible was profound. He had written: “The only thing God doesn’t own and wants so badly and continuously from us is our praise for Him. We have to decide whether we will praise His name.”

(2) Positive praise must be expressed. It’s not enough to simply feel adoration and appreciation to God. Praise doesn’t occur until you express it. Hebrews 13:15 says that the sacrifice of praise must be “the fruit of our lips.”

In his wonderful book, *The Hallelujah Factor*, Jack Taylor wrote: “Praise is always active, assertive, demonstrative, and open. It is not passive, presumptuous, undemonstrative or secretive. Whenever it is mentioned in the Bible, movement, action, sounds and songs are seen and heard.” (p. 16)

Positive praise can’t be silenced. In Luke 19 Jesus entered Jerusalem, and some people were singing and shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the king!” Some of the Pharisees got upset with this vocal outburst of praise and they said to Jesus, “Rebuke your disciples!” In Luke 19:40, Jesus said, “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out!” Last week, we learned that we are the living stones that make up the spiritual building—we can’t remain silent. Praise is not a mental exercise, it must be expressed.

Praise can be expressed with words, or with body language. The Psalmist says, "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands." (Psalm 63:2-3) You can praise God by saying or singing praise, by kneeling before Him, by bowing your head, or lifting your hands. Sometimes in my private worship I just lay on my face before the Lord and tell Him how wonderful He is. A bell is not a bell until you ring it—A song is not a song until you sing it—and praise is not praise until you express it!

C.S. Lewis wrote, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed."

(3) Positive praise can liberate you. The reason we praise God is because He is worthy of our praise, and He enjoys and inhabits the praises of His people. But there are some positive, personal benefits of praise for you as well. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) When you understand the power of positive praise, you'll be liberated in a way you never experienced before.

There's a great illustration of this found in Acts 16. The Apostle Paul and his companion, Silas, had been arrested and beaten by Roman soldiers. Then they were tossed in jail to await further sentencing. Acts 16:25 says, "About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and all the other prisoners were listening to them." Now, picture this—they've in jail, bleeding, and suffering. How did they react? Paul didn't weep or moan and groan about his situation. Instead he made the decision that he was going to praise the Lord. And he didn't just do it silently in his heart—he started singing out loud—all the prisoners heard them. The Bible says that at that moment there was an earthquake that was so strong that it opened the prison doors and everybody's chains came loose.

Our teenagers often sing a song about this very event. The last verse says: This may be a prison / And these may be chains / Still I am free / Free to praise His name. / In tribulation my heart still sings / He is Messiah / He is the King of kings. / Pris'ners started waking up / Singing filled their ears / Some men started swearing / Others were in tears. / Suddenly it happened / There was no mistake / As Paul and Silas praised the Lord / The walls began to shake. / I will praise the Lord. / I will praise the Lord. / No matter what tomorrow brings / Or what it has in store / I know I will praise the Lord.

Right now, some of you are in bondage. You may be chained to your past, or by your problems, or by your pain. You're still bleeding from some emotional or relational beating that you endured. You may think, "Well, when God sets me free, then I'll praise Him." No! Start praising Him NOW and you'll find that the chains slipping away. Pardon me for using so many song lyrics, but I can't help but remember the great lines in the old song from the group Truth that says, "For the chains that seem to bind you serve only to remind you that they drop powerless behind you when you praise Him" Have you discovered the liberating power of praise?

(4) Positive praise can replace your pain. Everybody is hurting in one way or another. When you're facing pain you have a choice. You can focus on your pain—and that usually leads to a pity party. Or you can focus on our Great God and they leads to a praise proclamation. It's your choice.

When Jesus preached his first message to His home synagogue in Nazareth, He chose Isaiah 61 as His text. After reading it He claimed to be the fulfillment of that prophecy. It made the home folks so angry they ran Him out of town and tried to throw Him off a cliff. They were angry because Jesus identified Himself as the Messiah and He claimed to be able to do what Isaiah prophesied. In other words, Jesus came to "comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." (Isaiah 61:3) Look at that last phrase. Jesus offers you a garment of praise instead of your spirit of despair. But you've got to *choose* to put on that garment of praise. As I look out at you this morning, I doubt any of you are wearing what you slept in last night. You made a choice this morning to put on some clothes. Praise is the same way. You must choose to praise Him. When you do, your pain and despair can be replaced by praise.

The story of Job is one that challenges each of us. The devil told God that if Job lost all his blessings, he would curse God to His face. God disagreed, so He allowed Satan to bring pain into his life. In the space of a single day, Job lost everything that was precious to him. Three of his friends came to console him, but they ended up suggesting that he must have done something terribly wicked to bring that kind of suffering on himself. Even his wife told Job to "curse God and die." But throughout his pain, he refused to curse God—in fact he continued to praise Him. Some of you have been where Job was.

I recently read a message by Pastor Larry Brincefield as he commented on his pain after the death of his young daughter. He wrote: Back in those days after my daughter, Hannah, died, I became very cynical. I doubted the story in Job. I studied different scholars, and picked up on one or two who suggested the story of Job never really happened, it was just a fictional story, beautifully written. And I bought into that, because I didn't think that anyone who had suffered the way Job did could respond the way that Job did.

Job, lost his farm, his livestock, his health, and his children—all within the period of 5 minutes. And how did Job respond to this multiple tragedy? Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Job 1:20-21 (NIV)

That is the best example of a sacrifice of praise I have ever read! And it haunts me and blesses me every time I read it. And the reason it does, I believe it happened just the way the Bible says it happened. It is completely true. We really can praise the Lord, no matter what the circumstances—that's why it is called a *sacrifice* of praise.

CONCLUSION

Positive praise can make a difference in your life—so will you start expressing your praise continually to God? I can remember when I was child I used to stand by my mother in church as we sang the hymns. My mother was the world's worst singer. She was completely tone deaf. She was like a prisoner singer—behind a few bars and couldn't find the right key! But she always sang—and it she didn't sing softly, either! When I got to be about 12 or 13 I realized she was off pitch—and so I would tell her to stop singing, or at least sing softly. I could tell she was hurt, and she'd turn the volume down a little. But she didn't stop singing.

Later when I began to understand praise I realized what she sang might not have sounded beautiful to those around her, but it sounded beautiful to God. She was making a joyful noise. She wasn't singing to the people around her, she was singing to God. Sometimes I can still remember what it was like to stand beside her in church and listen to her sing off key, and if I had known then what I know now, I would have said, "Sing mamma! Sing as loud as you can!"

There's a song that came out of Wales about 25 years ago. My family used to sing it a lot. It's says, "It's amazing what Praising will do. Hallelujah; Hallelujah. It's amazing what praising will do. Hallelujah. I don't worry when things go wrong. Jesus fills my life with a song. It's amazing what praising will do. Hallelujah!"

Who are you? You're a member of the Royal Priesthood! Why do you exist? To declare the praises of Him who brought you from darkness into light. So, go forth and praise His holy name!

OUTLINE

- I. Q: Who Am I?
A: Part of the King's Priesthood!

Priests build bridges (*pontifex*)

- II. Q: What is my purpose in life?
A: To declare God's praises!

POSITIVE PRAISE:

(1) Is offered in all circumstances

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name." *Hebrews 13:15*

(2) Must be expressed

"Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands." *Psalms 63:2-3*

(3) Can liberate you

"You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." *John 8:32*

(4) Can replace your pain

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." *Job 1:20-21 NIV*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes