

Apostolic Service: The Mystery of Priestliness

(Part II)

“And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces .” (Lev. 9:23, 24)

by Art Katz

Everything had been done according to as it was commanded, and then God Himself ignited the sacrifice supernaturally. It is interesting that the seventh day of waiting results in the eighth day of release. The number eight represents the resurrection life and power. Seven days of complete death and the eighth day of the power, which is the life of God Himself.

The Glory of God

If we have not seen that glory, it is because we have not fulfilled all that the Lord commanded us to do. If there is any single distinctive that is at the heart of apostolic, it is the singular jealousy for the glory of God. That is what makes us fools for Christ's sake, namely, a faith that believes for that glory and a jealousy for the demonstration of that glory. To have any lesser criterion for success is to rob God's people and to frustrate the Lord Himself and to fixate us at a lesser level.

When the glory of God appears, then the Lord appears, for the Lord is His glory. It is this appearance that the church so desperately needs. His glory is not some ethereal thing, but a substantive phenomenon that can be seen and experienced. We have lived so long without it that we are satisfied merely with the phrase about it without any real expectation for it. “To Him be the glory in the church...” is Paul's summation of the church in Ephesians 3:21a. There has got to be glory in the church or it simply is

not the church, and it has failed in its purpose, because if it does not come through the church, then it does not come. If it is not in the church, then how shall it be communicated anywhere in the world?

...and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces (vs. 24b).

That is the effect of the appearing of the glory of God on men, however resistant, stiff and self-willed, superficial and shallow they are. Your face is what you are. Everything came down before God when they saw that. That is blessedness. There was none of that ‘Amen’ and ‘Hallelujah’ stuff that punctuates our charismatic services, but a prostration that is so profound and so utter that when you rise from that, you never rise in the same way in which you went down. All of your seeing, your whole perspective, all of your reckoning, valuing and plans are affected by that going down. You cannot again go on as before. That is what happens when you fall before the demonstration of the glory of God. The God of Moses and Aaron is God still, and if He will have a priestly people on the earth as consecrated as was Aaron and his sons, as obedient as Moses, then that glory will again fall.

The priests were to teach the people the difference between the profane and the sacred. How as a Body can we manifest that distinction to the world? How can we perform priestly ministry with

such a discernment when such a priestly reality is absent from our lives? We have neglected to ascend the holy mount. We have lost all desire for transfiguration glory. We have not recognized that there is a holy place where one stands alone in the presence of God, ministering first to Him. We have grown content to remain outside the tent of meeting where our religious activity has become a kind of entertainment, technically correct, but devoid of glory, devoid of the fragrance of heaven and devoid of priestly ministry.

Jesus came out of the holy place with God and so must every minister who aspires to be priestly. The brashness, the metallic ring and the human, earthly atmosphere of so much ministry is sure evidence that men have not waited in the holy place or even recognize that there is such a place to which God is calling them and which awaits them.

Our voices, like our faces are a trademark and a statement of a consistent relationship with the God of all grace. They indicate in an unmistakable way what is the truth of and the depth of the relationship of a believer with his God. When that radiance comes, we will not know it. We will have come to a total unselfconsciousness about ourselves, that we will not even be aware that we are shining. This radiance is obtained in one place only, namely, the priestly place, a place of waiting in the presence of God by those who believe that there is such a place and have

the faith to enter it and live and move and have their being from that place. Then the world will know the difference between the sacred and the profane.

We desperately need the restoration of a priestly people. There has been such a failure of the priestly ministry to be expressed in our midst that we have lost even the desire to experience the glory of God. We have grown content with so little, content with merely 'good' meetings and expecting no more. An expectation must first be rekindled in us, an expectation that the glory of God can actually fall from heaven like fire—men brought down on their faces, awe, gasps, hands clasped over mouths, deep breakings. If we are desiring this result for the wrong reasons, then we can forget of ever seeing it. Those of us who desire to see people coming down in great prostration can even secretly desire it for their own self-glorification: When we seek to frame a message in order to impress our audience, then that is the end of the message. It is no longer a priestly word.

AS THE PRIEST, SO TOO THE PEOPLE

This is one of the reasons why we need each other. There is no man, however pure his priestly desire, who will not one day slip into some admixture and some desire for personal glorification if he is not in some kind of daily relationship with others who will detect the first signs of it and call it to his attention. This priestly-ministry jealousy cannot even be obtained by us alone. It is Aaron and his sons.

The whole congregation of Israel was assembled to witness the consecration of Aaron and his sons, because all were intimately involved and profoundly connected. The priest was not just a religious functionary who received payment for services rendered. There was a vital link. As the priest, so also the people. We see in Israel's history the decline of the priesthood, the loss of their purpose, their becoming a professional class and the

final horror is what Caiaphas became as the tormentor and persecutor of Jesus. We see how even that high calling can go so low. It was a statement of Israel itself. When the priests have come to that place, then the nation is also in that place. If you want to study the history of Israel, then study the history of its priesthood.

When Israel's priestly class was full of zeal, when it had a heavenly respect for its calling, when it was a separated class of men who feared God and revered the duties that they were given to perform and were faithful in performing them, then Israel was at its zenith. When they began, however, to be seduced away; when they were attracted to the Hellenistic culture that was then sweeping the world and which was the exaltation of man; when they began to give their children Greek names rather than Hebrew and came to be more fascinated with philosophy than sacrifice (which they had come to consider as crude and irrelevant), then Israel declined and ultimately collapsed.

The same could be said of the church at large today. We too are somewhat embarrassed and offended by the cutting and bloodshed that is inseparable from priestly ministry. We too are swept up in the culture of our day, finding the entertainments, the methods, the psychology and the wisdom of our age more enlightened and engrossing than the crude insistence on radical purging and cleansing. We have turned away from the priestly thing of sacrifice and blood. It is another way of saying that we have turned away from 'the offense of the Cross'.

God has established His order. The outer layers, passable in the world, must be stripped off and our nakedness washed by the Word. Then the priestly garments are put on, one by one, in prescribed order, and there was to be only the linen of righteousness—no wool, for God's priests shall not sweat. They went up, not on steps, but on a ramp. They did not even dare lift their legs to the next step lest any flesh be glimpsed. For no flesh shall stand in His presence and no sweat,

both the statements of religious, human exertion, rather than the priestly ministry that comes out of the rest of God. With all the hacking, all the slaying, all the blood letting, one would think that they would be drenched with sweat.

However, when we begin to do the prescribed thing given by God in an exacting obedience by the Life of God, it will not be done with sweat. The fact that our Sundays are so sweaty is a testimony to the fact that they are no longer priestly. One of the great ironies of our time is that more sweat is exuded on Sundays than any other day of the week. There is more feverishness, more anxiety, more apprehension and nervous exhaustion, more fleshly exertion to produce successful religion than we could imagine or care to acknowledge. If we were more jealous for His glory than our own honor and reputation, then we would not sweat so much.

To be priestly is to be untainted by human fretting, human contrivance and human exertion. There is something in all of the laborious requirements, something in the sacrifices and sprinklings, so immersed in blood and gore from finger tip to elbows, that precludes there being anything of themselves left to perform something priestly. This is the heart of the mystery of priesthood. It must be in the power of His everlasting life, not in some makeshift pumping up of ourselves in to some image of what we think priestly ministry ought to be. God's priests were so enervated, so devastated, so prostrated and so exhausted of all bravado and self-assurance and so filled with the understanding of the holiness of the things that were set before them, that they could not even begin to presume to initiate or to do anything out of their own humanity.

THE CALL TO PRIESTHOOD

We have fallen so far from the sense of priestliness, that we consider service to men to be the highest expression we can or need to attain. We regard the sweat of our exertions in that service as evidence of our fulfillment and approval, but God

sees it otherwise. The heavenly priest comes out from the holiest place, out from waiting upon God, out from being emptied from all his own good ideas, good intentions, methods. He leaves behind his own order of service, his own message, his own selection of songs and comes forth with that which is given by God from heaven. We need to see more such people who are willing to forsake their own intentions, because God has breathed upon their spirits in the holy place of rest and waiting.

Why is it that so often the worship in services is grueling and almost too painful to hear, that it itself is a sweaty exercise, almost like a calisthenics of going through certain charismatic exercises? Is it not because the men who lead it have not waited in the holy place? The disposition to wait on God is indispensable to true priesthood. It is both the prerequisite and the result of submitting to all of God's requirements. We are not, however, by nature disposed to wait upon God in the quiet and rest of hidden places. We are disposed rather always to do, and to do only what seems acceptable to our own understanding, an understanding that is never tried nor tested before God.

There seems to be a conspiracy and a calculated campaign to drive the consciousness of priesthood from the church. We are inundated with sound and noise, multimedia displays, concerts—the sensual ear and eye thing—that not only has to be heard, it has to be felt. If the amplification of the sound is not great enough that you feel the shock and the resounding of it, then it is not enough. In that milieu, God is yet calling us to be the priests of the holy place. If our speaking has anything to do with the releasing of the word of God from heaven, then it can only come from having heard what He has commanded us to bring in the holiest place of all, which is a place of silence.

When one such minister comes, who has waited in the place of silence, we are not always happy over him. We are intimidated because we thought that we had it

all together. We saw ourselves as well-meaning and industrious elders, who were able to quote the Scriptures and had a firm grasp on the doctrines of the faith and knew how to counsel men. Then comes a visitor from heaven, a priest of God, and we are devastated. He brings an aura, a fragrance, a spirit that challenges us and reveals us to ourselves. All of a sudden

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we feel earthbound, heavy and all too human. We recognize that so much of what we had been doing and saying had become old, earthbound and stale.

We need more invasions from heaven and more such priests who will come and minister before men only after they had first ministered to God in the holy place. We need priestly ministry, ministry from men who have first made sacrifice for themselves, who have first offered up their flesh, their own ambitions, their own vanity, and self-deceit, their own fear and greed and man-pleasing, men who have a heart to endure the wearisome requirements of God, to submit to painful dealings, men who are prepared to see blood spurt and wounded flesh writhe and kick and gasp for breath, men who will stand steadfast and unswayed, who will let death be worked in them to the end, who are willing to suffer the reproach and

embarrassment of inner parts being exposed. Such men are rare. They are God's priests who alone are qualified to wield God's sword, sanctified by blood; who alone have the disposition and utter fearlessness required to cut into the flesh of God's people and to expose the inward hidden parts of our being, to wound flesh and let its life blood flow out and to perform priestly ministry in God's house.

THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

Though the Levitical practices are no longer required, the truth of them yet stands. We need to have our understanding altered, because of His Son, God says:

Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6b).

It is a new order, not the Aaronic order. The old order is dispersed and lost. The new order is older than the Aaronic order. The older order has merely been restored, because when Abraham came back from defeating the kings of Sodom and that area, he met a mystical figure and gave him a tenth of all that he had. He deferred to him, for the lesser is blessed of the greater. This high priest served him bread and wine and his name was Melchizedek. It was an Old Testament glimpse, a pre-incarnate flash of what is to be the abiding and eternal glory of the Son of Man, who abides a priest forever. Abraham, great man of faith that he was, recognized the authority and superiority of that priesthood. It precedes even the establishment of the Aaronic order, which was only itself a shadow of the greater thing to come.

Not only is there a connection between apostolic and priesthood, but there is also a connection between that which pertains to sons and that which pertains to priests. This mysterious high priest, this Melchizedek, is not descended from the genealogy of Aaron, but a king of righteousness and peace, of whom it says in the Scriptures:

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Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually (Heb. 7:3).

There is a remarkable antithesis to the earlier Aaronic priesthood—exactly opposite to this. The new order is above culture, time and nationality. It is without beginning of days or ending of life. The Aaronic priesthood required genealogy, ancestry and earthly identification. In fact, anything earthly contradicts it. The new resembles the Son of God, a priest without interruption. It is exhausting even to consider this, the kind of priest who ever lives to make intercession for the saints. What is the source of His animation, His energy and His life? We are exhausted just to consider these possibilities, yet God has called us to be such a church and such a presence, such a fulfillment of His eternal purpose and such an agency for a Kingdom that is to come. What kind of priesthood is this? This is something other than a professional, ministerial posture that is somehow appropriate behind the pulpit, but something other in the private life. This is true priesthood, a priesthood without interruption. Are we jealous to be this kind of a priest? Do we recognize that except this dimension be added to our being, then there is no way that we can consider Jesus the Apostle, no more than He Himself can fulfill His Apostolic dimension without also being the High Priest of our confession? It is equally incumbent and required of us, a priesthood of this kind, not on the basis of natural qualification, but in exact proportion as we resemble the Son of God, that is to say, priests without interruption, above time, culture and nationality, without mother or father or ancestry, without beginning of days or ending of life, a continual flow out from the Throne of God Himself on the basis of the power of an endless and indestructible life. A Son who has been made a Priest forever.

The higher and the true identity is the one in God that abides as a priest forever.

It will take a wrenching, because how will your father and mother like it? It is as if you have to renounce your physical identification as a slap in their face. You have to be cut off from those things that want to obsess you and establish your identification in earthly terms. It is part of the price and one cannot explain it to men. "Who is My mother?", said Jesus, in reply to being told that His mother and brothers were waiting outside. By an earthly evaluation that sounds cruel, but that is because we have not entered into His priestliness and we have not understood the profound detachment that a priest must have from every fleshly connection on the face of the earth. Ironically, we will never be a better son or daughter than when we will come to this priestly detachment. There is a whole sickly, soulish involvement of life between mothers and sons and grandchildren where they live off each other. It is a vampiry type of thing that sucks the blood.

We need to come to an identity beyond what we are in the earthly and natural way, and yet not to diffuse or eliminate male nor female, Jew nor Gentile. That is Satan's ploy. He wants to obscure and eliminate the distinctions that God counts very important. It is not that they should be abolished, but that something transcendent comes out of the union of these distinct entities that creates a 'new man'. It is a strange paradox of being a Jew or a Gentile, a male or female and not annulling that obvious thing, but esteeming it as from the God who gave it for His own purposes, and yet not celebrating it in a way that forms a kind of membrane between ourselves and those who are not like us. Wherever time, culture, ethnic, earthly and temporal factors are invoked, consciously or unconsciously, we move out of that priestliness, and we forfeit the Biblical priestly ground and its power.

We come into this calling because we have come into the Son, who is the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace, the High Priest of God. If we are in the Son of Man by virtue of joining Him in

His death by the power of the Cross through baptism, we are also with Him abiding as a priest continually. We are in the Melchizedek priesthood in exact proportion as we are abiding in the Son—no more and no less. It has nothing to do with natural factors, but only with resurrection life, a life offered in sacrifice and raised up in glory. We are brought to a transcendent place of identification with Him by which every natural, racial, religious, ethnic and other distinction is transcended.

INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of a physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:15-16).

It is the same life that burst forth out of death, that resplendent glory that is available to everyone who will give it opportunity to be expressed out of their death. It is the foundation of the royal priesthood and the community of God. This kind of priesthood, that is uninterrupted and that resembles the Son of God, needs also to have as its foundation and source His endless and indestructible life. This is not something that we can do. We are not going to play at being priests by building on the strength of our own expertise, our own ability, knowledge, minds, religious cleverness and even our own well-meaning intention.

The Melchizedek priesthood is not based on the inheritance that is come by blood and ancestry, but it is based on the inheritance that has come by the blood of the Lamb, to those who have entered into the Life of that Blood and have put aside their own that they might express through that Blood and through that Life these priestly things.

It is my conviction that the issue of the resurrection is going to be the fiercest end-time issue for the people of God. It is going to be the plumb line of God that separates the false church from the true. It

is not that the false church will not applaud the doctrine of the resurrection, it is simply that they will refuse to live in it and by it. That shall be the great divide, between those who have mere verbal profession and those who are in the Life.

What is the fundamental basis for our identification, our own identity and our own knowledge of ourselves? A priest is detached from racial, ethnic and cultural lines as well as from time and place. He is one who occupies the heavens with God. He is not at all affected or limited by present contemporary culture. He stands above it. He is transcendent, and therefore he is relevant everywhere and at any time and at every place.

SEATED IN HEAVEN

There is something about the nature of this priestliness of such an emancipating kind, that it is little wonder that it can give itself perpetually to the purposes of God, for the basis of its energy is endless and indestructible! This type of ministry is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, a minister in the holy place, the true Tabernacle that is not erected by man, but by God.

Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all... (Heb. 8:4a)

Our High Priest is in another dimension, namely, the heavenly place. Anything less than that would invalidate His priestliness. He has His true existence and reality in the heavenly sanctuary. If He dwelt on the earth, which is to say, if His values and mind-set were earthly, then He would not be a Priest at all.

God intended that those made in His image would live in the reality of heaven even while on the earth. They are on it but they do not dwell in it. When the smoke clears at the very end of the age, in the eschatological climax, there will only be two species of mankind to be found on earth, and it has nothing to do with race, but with earth or heaven. Those who dwell in the earth, whose hearts fail them for fear of the things that shall be coming

upon the earth (for that is all they know and all they look for and expect. All of their values are established in it. They are earthlings), and the other group are those who dwell in heaven. They may be on the earth, but it is not their place of habitation. Earth is not where they reside, but the place where they serve. Most of us as

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Christians are such earthlings, so moored in the earth, so bound by its gravitational tug, so connected by soulful ties of affection and investment in the earth that we cannot break loose to ascend up into the heavenly place.

The Holy of Holies

This is a Priest who can come before God in the holiest place of all—and only the High Priest can. God has eternally fixed it. Therefore, in Exodus 25, it is interesting to read the description of that holiest place. God gives it to us in extraordinary detail. We know that the Tabernacle of God, like the Temple which came later, has the same essential architectural pattern and outer court, that is open to the daylight without any covering. The place of entry is the bronze altar for sacrifice

and the basin for washing, symbolic of our entry into the house of God through the atonement of the Blood of the Lamb. As we then proceed further, there is a second court and this is covered by skins, and there is a veil and the priests daily entered. There were not as many as trafficked in the first court, in the heavy labor of sacrifice and fire and slaughter, but by those priests whose function it was to light, both morning and night, the holy altar of incense, and to place the shewbread on the table of the Lord. It was a room that was shut off from the natural daylight. It received its illumination from a seven-branched candlestick, a much brighter light, not subject to the variables of the natural elements of weather and sunlight. It is a constant light and a brighter light, but there is yet a final and an ultimate place and few there be that have entered there. It is the holiest place of all! The Holy of Holies, and there is no daily traffic there. There was only one who could enter there in the course of an entire year, and that on the basis of the blood of a pure sacrifice. In that place there was no seven-branched candlestick, and yet it is the brightest and most glorious light of all. It is the Shekinah glory of God Himself. It is His Presence, directly over the mercy seat and over the ark of the Law.

And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony,

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I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (Exodus 25:17-22).

Paul cried out again and again, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Perhaps some of us have begun to emit such a groan as we become increasingly conscious of the magnitude of what this apostolic and priestly calling is. How do we move from an institutional age toward the restoration of apostolic glory in the church? How do we communicate the dimension of things that have been lost in our modern church experience? How are we to restore the sense of urgency and imminence of the things that shall shortly come to pass? How shall we warn our generation that God has appointed a Day in which He will judge all nations by Him whom He has raised from the dead? How are we to be fitted for such apostolic confrontation? Where is our courage and our boldness, our understanding and our sensitivity? We need to thread our way through all these painful adjustments and turn from the power of tradition and the established and institutional ways of men, in order to come to the formation of this living church, this powerful, prophetic witness, whose presence alone is a testimony to the principalities and powers of the air. Where are we to find our answers?

And there I will meet with you...and speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (v. 22).

This is the alternative to becoming mere technicians and adopting yet another brittle phraseology. God bids us come into the holiest place of all, the high-priestly place that is open to those who come in the form of the Son of God, without father or mother, or beginning or ending of days. It is the source of the indestructible life, a source of inspiration and anointing of words that He will give us, if we are to fulfill the mandate of God. There is a holy place beyond, and there is an entry within that veil by the Holy Spirit symbolized by that burning incense on the

altar that continually ascends up to God, a picture of the worship that comes with the induction into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There is a seeing in a much brighter light new things beyond the initial issue of salvation to the more serious and purposeful things of God. It is a deeper place that admits only 'high priests', who are called also to that which is apostolic. In this place is found the "stewardship of the mysteries of God."

We will never glimpse the things apostolic and true except in this light. We will never fulfill the apostolic mandate and evangelize the world except it be by the words that are given with inspiration, and that are communicated with the intensity of the Life that is transmitted in the holiest place of all. God bids us enter into this place, and to dwell in that Presence, for there He will meet with us and give us all in commandment for the sons of Israel.

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

THE SABBATH REST

We are bidden to enter within the veil. It is the Sabbath rest that God has prepared for His people. Religious acts and works that stem from a bad conscience, that is to say, something that you feel obliged to do, are called dead works by God. The work of God comes always and eminently out of the rest of God and is always performed on the Sabbath day and no other. It alone is that act which brings sight to the blind.

When the Jews of Jesus' time were antagonized and stupefied at this bewildering Man, who performed these glorious things on the wrong day, He could say to them in utter simplicity that it was the Father who was doing the works. You will know when you are in the rest of God when you are at peace, not because there is an absence of trial or tension, but because even in the midst of the turmoil of it, yet are you in the Shekinah place, the holiest place of all, independent of the

circumstances that are flurrying everywhere about you.

God is not cruel to set before us such a calling and to think that we shall be able to fulfill it on the paucity of our own human enablement. There is yet a deeper place, an ultimate place, an absolute place. It is the holiest place of all and it is for all those who are called to that which is apostolic and high-priestly. Consider Jesus as you have never before considered Him—the Son in whose image we also are called. For he who is joined to Him is one spirit with Him. We can understand Paul better when he says that he lives and moves and has his being in Him. Where are we and where do we desire to be, and where have we the faith to be? Do we desire an apostolic participation in the eternal purposes of God? Will we be able to stand against apostolic persecution and suffering, where we count not our life as dear unto ourselves? We have got to come into a certain priestly place without which there cannot be an apostolic fulfillment. Jesus has rent the veil and bids us come, on the basis of His qualification. Let us therefore enter within the veil with a true and sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

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Art Katz is the founder of Ben Israel Fellowship, a small community of believers seeking to live an apostolic and prophetic lifestyle.

This article is the second part of "Apostolic Service: Priestliness" taken from his book which will soon be published entitled Apostolic Foundations. Readers are welcome to download this and other articles from the author's web site, <benisrael.org> or they can contact the IJFM editor and ask for additional articles on Apostolic Foundations.