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Does God Have Any Needs?

Many people have a sneaking suspicion that God is mad at them.

Some believers feel deep down inside them that God is out to get them. Others think that He is only for those who are Christians.

But God is for everybody. He is the God of all nations, and He is for all people.

God is not the God of the Jews only, or of the Christians only. He loves the Arabs as much as He loves the Jews. He loves the North Americans, the Africans, and the South Americans. He loves them, and He is for them all.

How can we know that God loves us and is for us? He demonstrated this supremely, of course, in His Son. Jesus is the love of God in the form of a human being.

But Jesus Himself is no longer on the earth as a human being. So He has chosen those who believe in Him to show His love to the world. Believers are His representatives today. We are Christ to this world.

If people do not see the love of God in us, they will not see it at all. We are Christ's only means of expressing Himself in our three-dimensional realm. Either they see God's love through Christ dwelling in us, or they don't see it at all.

Centuries before Jesus came on earth, God selected a particular nation to show His love to the world.

That nation was Israel. He made a covenant, an agreement, with them. "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6).

When God called Israel, He called them with the world in mind. He is the God of all nations, and He called Israel to be a kingdom of priests to those nations. It was His intention to use them to show His love to mankind. He had in mind the whole creation, because of His promise to Adam and Eve concerning the serpent and the Redeemer who would come to deliver man. This Redeemer wasn't coming only to the Jewish people; He was coming to all nations, white, black, brown and yellow.

Why did God choose Israel?

He chose them because they were Abraham's descendants, and He had promised that through Abraham He would bless "all the families of the earth." Israelites were going to be the priests of God, to show His love to all the world.

But Israel became self-righteous.

"We are the people of God, they said. 'We are the chosen ones. Those other nations are the heathen. Pooh! We are the privileged ones, the holy nation.'"

They forgot the rest of the world. Not only did they not become priests for the rest of the nations, they came to the point where they needed priests themselves. They were chosen to be priests between God and the other nations, but they forgot their role to such an extent that God had to give them their own priest. So the Levites were chosen to confess the sins of the people and to offer sacrifices for them.

What about the rest of the world? The Jews' attitude was, let them die! To the Jews, other nations were garbage. So the job never got done. They didn't manifest God's love to the whole world.

Now the same words which were spoken to the people of

Israel at Mt. Sinai have been said to us who believe in Jesus.

"You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter 2:5,9).

In Acts 13 we see such priests in operation.

In the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers. Among them were Paul and Barnabas. They were "ministering to the Lord." They were functioning as priests. What were they saying? The Bible doesn't tell us. But to minister is to meet the needs of a person, and they were meeting the needs of God.

How did they minister to God?

For many years I never knew, because in seminary they taught us how to minister to people but never how to minister to God. But we can tell by the context what they were doing. The Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then the church "sent them away."

In other words, they had been asking the Lord, "What about the rest of the world, Lord?"

I admire the spirit of the Lord's people in Antioch. They never complained when the Lord took their pastors and sent them to the other nations. They didn't say, "No, we want that pastor to stay here. We are going to vote to keep him."

So, they were ministering by saying, "*Come on, Lord. What about the rest of the world?*"

God's answer was for them to separate the best pastors they had and send them out. Two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Selucia and from there to Cyprus. This was their first missionary trip. They were functioning as priests, a holy people, a chosen race.

What does the word priest mean?

It brings into our minds a man with long, black robes. But that is not it. A priest is a person who is between man and God. Another word is intercessor. It means one who stands between two parties. He wants to further God's kingdom—to promote God's business, God's ways, God's desires among men. He is also one who is concerned for man's business in the presence of God. He is an arbitrator between two parties, which is not a very easy job.

So really a priest is a friend.

He is a friend of God and has influence with God. He is also a friend of man and has influence with man. He ministers to man in favor of God, and ministers to God in favor of man.

Sometimes it is not easy to be a friend of man and a friend of God at the same time. It is like being in the middle of a two-way road—you can be hit from both sides. But that is the whole essence of priesthood—to be a friend of both parties. If you do not have access, acceptance and friendship with both sides, you cannot be a priest.

What does it mean to function as a priest, as a minister, as an intercessor?

A minister is one who meets the needs of men. When a person is in need of hope, in need of healing, in need of forgiveness or in need of counseling, then the Lord uses different ones of His priests to meet those needs. So if I am given \$1,000 to give to ten needy persons, it is my responsibility to administrate it for those ten people. And I think about how I am going to meet their needs in the most effective way.

But we also have to minister to God. "Does God have any needs?" you ask.

Believe it or not, God has tremendous needs. He is in great need of our service. This is why He appoints priests or intercessors.

Let me cite an instance from Scripture. You will find it in

Ezekiel 22. The whole chapter describes the horrible social, political and spiritual condition that the people of Israel were in.

It is summarized in verse 29: "The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice."

What was God's attitude toward this tragic state of affairs? "And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (verse 30). Because He found no one, He had to punish them as a nation and deliver them to an enemy in order to put a stop to all of the suffering that they were bringing upon themselves.

God was upset by the way they were vexing the poor, the elderly and the defenseless. But God didn't want to destroy them for their sin. He was searching for just one person who would stand in the gap before Him on behalf of the nation of Israel, but He couldn't find one. If He had found one person with a heart like that, God would not have punished them. But there wasn't one priest, one intercessor, in the whole nation.

One of the greatest problems in the church today is that we do not believe in a personal, living God—an existentialist God. Instead, He is a set of rules and a set of doctrines. If we do what the rules say, and agree with the doctrines, we can feel safe. If we don't, we are fearful.

Our God is a person, full of feelings and emotions.

He is a person who feels happy and also gets angry. He laughs and cries. He is a person whom you can talk with, a person to whom you can explain things. He is One you can reason with, and who understands. He is reasonable, logical.

You can come to Him and say, "What about this situation?" And He will hear.

God is not a book full of rules. He is a person. He needs friends, and He is searching for friends.

A bishop from India said that he had been a very religious man before he was converted to Christianity. He had wor-

shipped in every conceivable kind of temple. But he said that one word converted him to Christianity, and that word was "access."

He never found access to any of his gods in all of those temples, though they were myriad. He found access to God through Christ Jesus. The key idea of the New Testament is that we have access to God.

But we are too conscious of the Old Testament concept of God. "We come into Your presence," we say.

But God is tired of all that! He wants friends who will call Him *Abba*, "Daddy."

Once the Prince of Wales came to visit Argentina. When he arrived, we had all kinds of ceremonies. As he got off the plane there was the noise of the canon, and then music, and the formal greetings from government officials. I imagine that when he got into the hotel by himself he said, "Whew!"

The Prince of Wales saying that?

Of course. Do you think he lives in a tuxedo? He lives in pajamas, too—unless it is too hot. Yes, he gets tired of protocol.

I believe that God wants to fellowship with us when we are tired and sit with our shoes off or are relaxing in the bathtub. But we are too sophisticated. We have all of this protocol, and He is bored with it.

God is a person, inviting friendship. He wants to sit beside you and say, "Son or daughter, I love you."

He wants you to tell Him that you also love Him. He sent Jesus to earth for this very reason—to open access for us so that we could be His friends.

Actually, some of God's closest friends were not all that holy.

David was a man according to God's heart, but look at the things he did.

Abraham was the friend of God, and he did many things wrong. In fact, he was one of the worst ones! His father was a maker of idols, so he grew up in the worship of idols. He

wasn't too good before God called him. But God made him His friend through grace, and purposed to bless the rest of mankind through him. It wasn't because Abraham was someone special, but because God needed him for His friend.

"You are going to be My precious friend, and through you a whole nation will be born who will also be My friends," God promised Him. "Although I am the God of all nations, I choose you to be close to Me and to bless the rest of mankind."

This is the real purpose of our friendship with God. It is not just to satisfy our ego so that we can say, "I am a friend of God."

God once went to Abraham's tent in the morning and spent the whole day with him. You read of it in the 18th chapter of Genesis.

God actually slept in Abraham's tent! How nice to have God sleeping in your tent. They talked, while Sarah prepared bread, and yogurt, and other dishes, with Abraham helping. God loves friendship. And before He left He gave Abraham the tremendous news of the coming of Isaac.

Imagine God coming to be with you the whole day! We preachers give five minutes to this and five minutes to that, but God spent the whole day in His friend's house just to give him the good news about Isaac. We see this of God's friendship throughout the Scriptures. He really takes an interest in His friends.

"Well, I have to leave," said God.

Then He thought to Himself, "I am going to destroy the neighboring cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because their sins are reaching up to heaven. Now these people are close to Abraham, but I haven't told him what I am going to do. I should tell him. What kind of friend is it that doesn't tell the other his secrets? I think I should tell him."

So he said, "Abraham, come."

"Yes, Lord, I am here."

"You are My friend. I have to share something with you. I am going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah."

"But why?"

"Because their wickedness has reached up to heaven and we are tired of it all. They are bringing such terrible misery upon themselves, we have no option but to destroy them."

"Wait a moment, "Abraham said. "I never knew this side of You. You are going to destroy these cities?"

"Yes, because of their wickedness."

"Are there not some just people living in those cities? Is everyone crooked? Are you going to destroy the just with the unjust? I can hardly believe that of a friend of mine!"

"Well, no—I don't want to destroy the just. So if there are 50 who are righteous in the city, I will not destroy it."

"Good. But what if there are only 45? Are you still going to destroy it?"

"Of course not. What do you think I am?"

"And suppose there aren't 45? What if there are only 40, or 30, Or 20? What if only 10 of them are righteous?"

"No, I won't destroy the city if there are just 10."

"Ah, that is better. I knew that You were really like this. You are wonderful."

"Thank you. But it is I who appreciate you because you reminded Me of this. We intended to destroy them all, we were so upset."

But there were not ten. The only righteous one was Lot. So when God arrived at the city He remembered Abraham's concern and took Lot and his family out of the city before He destroyed it. He did it for Abraham. What power there is in a friendship!

There are many instances of this in the Bible. God loves to have friends who remind Him of His nature, standing in the gap between God and man. This is what being a priest is all about, and it is tremendously important that we understand this in the times in which we are living.