

13

Save Your Protocol for the President

The situation at the time of the flood was so terrible that God could stand it no longer. The whole earth had become corrupt, and violence was rampant. Every thought that men had was of how to do greater evil to one another.

So God determined to put an end to it all.

Noah was a friend of God. When God decided to destroy the whole earth, he was the priest to stand between God and man. A good priest doesn't use his influence to save himself. He has the rest of the world in mind. This is the reason he is chosen as a priest.

Whether Noah did all he could, we don't know. But at the end of 120 years of preaching, no one had been convinced. Perhaps he only preached against their sins, instead of showing them God's love, I don't know.

Following the flood, after God had expressed His full anger and was starting to cool down, He thought over what had happened on the earth.

"Look what I had to do!" He said to Himself. "Everything killed—the whole earth flooded. But they deserved it. I had the right to do it, because I created them and they sinned against Me."

After the water receded, Noah very innocently got out of the ark and built an altar. He took one of each of the animals

that God had designated as acceptable as sacrifices and offered them on the altar.

Now, God was up in heaven saying to Himself, "Didn't I do right? Look what they caused Me to do." Then He smelled the sweet savor of Noah's offering.

"What is this sweet savor?" He asked the angels.

"It's Noah, from planet earth—the planet You just destroyed," they said.

"Noah? For Me? Look at that! Isn't that nice? I will never destroy the earth again like that. I will not curse it again. I will not let it rain that hard ever again, and I will put an arc in the sky to remind Me when it rains that I should be careful."

This is the power of a priest. The ministry of priests is to change attitudes—to change the attitude of man toward God, and of God toward man.

It is a tremendous responsibility to be called as a priest. A great many lives are dependent upon how we function in this task. If we forget what it was like to be a sinner and begin to judge and condemn people instead of loving them, we are like Jonah. He was called as a priest, but he didn't do a very good job.

Nineveh was a very sinful city. God told the prophet Jonah, "Go and tell the Ninevites that I am going to destroy them. I have had enough of their wickedness."

Jonah didn't want to go because he didn't care about all of those people. Let God destroy them! So God had to persuade him to go by means of a great fish.

Jonah should have done what Abraham did. But did he do that? No, he was glad that the Ninevites were going to be destroyed. We need priests who, when they know that a calamity is coming upon a city or a country, go before God and say, "Please, no! Don't destroy them."

But Jonah's attitude was like that of some of us today, "So You're going to destroy them? Well, they deserve it."

When God didn't destroy Nineveh, Jonah got upset.

"This is the very reason I didn't want to go there," he said. "I knew that You would forgive them if they were to repent!"

Instead of Jonah fulfilling the role of the priest, the heathen king of Nineveh became the city's intercessor. He stood in God's presence on behalf of the people and fasted.

"Look at that!" God said. "Look what he is doing! How can I destroy them?"

So Nineveh was spared.

One of the greatest intercessors was Moses. He really knew what it meant to be a priest. Do you recall the occasion when God became angry at the people, out in the wilderness?

"I can't stand it any more. I will destroy them and make a great nation out of you instead," he told Moses.

Moses wasn't interested in himself because he had the love of God. His total concern was for the people. He was willing to risk his own life to identify with them. He understood the principle behind Jesus' words when He said that if we really want to follow Him and be priests as He is our High Priest, we will be willing to take up a cross like He did and lay our lives down for others in order to show God's love for them.

So Moses answered God, "I will not get out of the way. If You destroy them, You will have to destroy me, too."

"What are you talking about, Moses?"

"I mean just what You heard. Take me out of Your book. The whole world is going to say, 'Look at their God. He took them out of Egypt to crush them in the wilderness. Look at that!' I won't stand by and let You do it."

"But Moses, you'll be all right. Just let Me destroy all of these wicked people, and I'll begin over again by starting a nation with you."

"Wait a moment! Cool down. This is not the way, to kill them all."

So Moses touched the heart of God, because God is not a

set of rules, a list of do's and don't's. He isn't One who condemns, and who can't be reasoned with. He is a person. You can talk to Him.

Jesus came in a human body like ours to be the greatest priest ever.

He lived on this earth, so He knows everything about being human. We do not have a High Priest who is unable to have compassion, because He went through all of the different experiences of being human that we go through. He also experienced the power of temptation. Because He understands, we can talk to Him. We can change God's attitude about a situation.

The reason we are not good priests today is because we don't know too much about friendship.

We have a religion instead of a relationship. If we had a relationship instead of all of our protocol, we would understand God's heart and know how to touch Him and change His attitude toward the people for whom we are called as priests.

What if I were to say to my wife, "Mrs. Ortiz, I come into your presence today..."? Our marriage would not last too long that way! And in the same way, God wants to enjoy the friendship that exists in a family. He is our Father. He is not a set of rules; He is a person.

This is not just a concept that I am giving you, it is a reality. I have experienced this wonderful fellowship with God personally. He really likes this kind of friendship, and He is looking for it.

People say to me, "But I like the protocol. I like the formality when I address God."

Yes, but what about what God likes?

Save your protocol for the President, or for the Queen, if you like it, but don't offer it to God. We are here to minister to Him, not to make ourselves feel nice by being very religious.

Our first child, David, slept all day, and cried all night.

After a few months, we were depressed and irritated because we couldn't sleep. So I said to Martha, "I am going to spank him, because he has to learn that the nighttime is for sleeping."

I turned the light on and I went to his bed. He was all smiles. "Goo, goo," he said.

"Look at this rascal," I said to Martha. "How can you spank a child that is smiling?"

God is a person with feelings. Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others changed God's attitude, just as I change my children's and my wife's attitude—and they know how to change mine when I am upset.

A priest is one who reconciles two parties. He has received the ministry of reconciliation, and his joy is to see two sides reconciled. There is nothing more important to him than this. He is willing to lay down his life to make it possible, just like Moses.

In New York City a pastor by the name of David Wilkerson opposed the police on behalf of some drug addicts. Everyone else was accusing them, but he was one man who was willing to fight for them. As a result, he won the love of those drug addicts.

But a priest has to be the friend of both sides. He cannot be one-sided.

So when we want to bring about reconciliation between a man and God, we first talk to one side.

"God, I understand. I am just like him. But because You created us, You have the right to do as You wish. Think it over. Perhaps He will accept You."

Then we say to God, "You know that we have been wicked from our youth. But You shed the blood of Jesus for the whole earth."

"Come on," we say to the man, "God will receive you."

"God, won't You take him in?"

We are in the middle, trying to make peace. So we have to

Speak good of men to God, and good of God to men. But if we act as gossips... "Look what they are doing! That's terrible! "...we are helping God to condemn people. We are no better than Jonah. We are not suited to be priests.

Today, some prophets say that California is going to sink into the sea. They are willing for that to happen so that their prophecy is proved right. We don't need those kind of priests! Instead, we need priests who say, "No, God! Are You going to sink the whole of that beautiful state?"

Do you think that you are going to please God by saying, "Yes, God, destroy them all"? No, you will not please Him. Because He will say to you, "And you, what did you do about it? I sought for a man who would stand before Me for the land that I should not destroy it, and where were you?"

God loves the world. I believe that every move God ever made was a move of love.

He called Noah, Abraham, Moses and countless others to stand in the gap between Himself and the people of the world. He called them because He loved the world. He sent His own Son into the world to be the great High Priest, to stand as a friend of both sides. And He has placed you where you are to be a priest, and to make His love known to those around you.

The universal priesthood of the believer is one of the great doctrines of the new covenant. Every believer is a priest. God said, "Well, it failed with Israel, but with the church it is going to work. I'll make them a kingdom of priests."

We are here to stand between the world and God. But we tell our ministers, "Please pray for me." So this puts the ministers between God and us. And what about those outside the church? We have no time for them. We are centered on ourselves instead of functioning as priests.

Ever since I was 14 years of age, I have been in the pulpit. I grew up spending all my time with the holy nation. I was a

good church person. My fellowship was always with the professors of the seminary, or with pastors.

Then I discovered that I didn't know how to relate to the problems my people were facing in their factories and offices. So I decided to get a job in order to learn how to minister to them. I wanted to get in touch with their needs. I stayed in the pastorate, but I got a job as a part of my pastoral work, to see how my people lived.

The first day I was at work, they started to tell me all the blue and green jokes they knew. I never in all my life heard such things! I couldn't believe it.

On Monday morning everybody came to work to tell about all the dirty things they did on Saturday and Sunday—all the women they slept with, how they got drunk, everything that was ugly.

They brought pictures to the factory, and I said, "My goodness, is this where my people live? Then I am not ministering to them at all. I am telling them Bible stories about the millennium and the seven trumpets. They don't need that. They need to know how to face the situations they live in."

Many Christians are always saying with horror, "Look what that person is doing! Look what a wicked city this is! Lord, how can you spare them?"

God doesn't need those persons. Neither do we.

We are so afraid of being contaminated by the world. We forget that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. We have to love people and get in among them as Jesus did.

Jesus became our close relative. He became incarnate and dwelt among us. He didn't separate Himself from the world and put a sign up outside His house proclaiming, "Church of Jesus." He didn't expect the people to come to Him; He went to them.

On one occasion, He went to Matthew's house. It was full of publicans and sinners. "Look at that," the religious

people said. "He can't be a prophet. He is in Matthew's house, and it is full of sinners. Drugs, cards, prostitutes—doesn't He know what kind of people these are? If He were a prophet, He would know about them and avoid them."

But Jesus went anyway and told stories about the kingdom of God because He didn't come to condemn, He came to save.

We are too holy. We are quick to forget what it was like to be a sinner. So we go to the non-smoking side and let those on the smoking side die!

To be priests, we have to be friends of both sides in order to reconcile them. We have to become involved in people's lives in order to bring them to God. This is what it is to be an intercessor—to be one who stands between the two parties.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:1-4).

This is what pleases God—a love for all men. Not, "Oh God, judge these terrible sinners."

God doesn't like that kind of prayer. He wants all men to be saved. He must sorrow when He sees us so self-centered, with concern just for ourselves.

"Alleluia, we are going to heaven!"

Yes. But what about everyone else? It displeases our Savior when we have this attitude, because He wants everyone to go to heaven.

"For God so loved the world," the Bible says. Let's change that to read, "For we so love the world, that we would do anything for them to be saved." This is what it means to be a priest.