

“Every Believer Is a Minister” – Jeremiah Ebeling

1 Peter 2:9 -- 8/19/2012

My name is Jeremiah Ebeling, the pastor of student ministries here at Grace. Welcome to Grace this morning.

I have got to start by telling you what happened to me this morning. I was coming down the stairs and my four-year old, Luke, was sitting at the dining room table. He took one look at me and said, “Dad, you finally look like a pastor now.” So here I am, finally a pastor now according to my four-year old Luke. We’ll see if this morning goes well based on that.

I want to tell you too that we had a great summer camp a few weeks ago. It was just incredible. The Spirit of God did some amazing things in our group and in the lives of our students. One thing that I know is that many of you were praying for us. I just want to say thank you so much for being part of our family and praying for us as we went off to Mo Ranch. We felt the difference at Mo. Praise God for that.

When we got home, my wife Dayna and I decided to try to figure out a way to recover a bit from camp. So we loaded up our four kids, all four and under, and drove down to San Antonio for two days. We got down there and went to the San Antonio Zoo and stayed in a hotel room, all in the same room that night. Then the next day we went to Fiesta Texas. This was our recovery plan. After barely surviving those two days, we are still recovering from that trip, I think. We definitely made some good memories and some bad ones on that trip. It is funny how quickly your goal on those kinds of experiences goes from having a fun, relaxing time, to just not yelling too loudly at your kids in public places. Come on, God, just give me enough patience to survive this thing.

So, we are back now and it is fun to be back. Next week, we kick the Fall off here at Grace. Matt Cassidy, our senior pastor, is going to be back up here. So I am thrilled about that.

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To start us this morning, this is what I want to ask each one of you to do. I would like you to take your Bible and put that Bible underneath your chair. You are not going to need your Bible any longer. If you have your Bible on an iPhone or iPad, you can put that under your chair as well. At the end of the service, we will be taking up all of your Bibles. If you have any Bibles at home, we need you to bring them next week because we are going to be taking those up as well. This is the only place, Grace Covenant Church, on Sunday mornings, where you are going to be able to experience Scripture from now on. You can’t read it on your own. Sorry to let you know that this morning.

The second thing I want to let you know is that Grace is the only place you are going to be able to talk to God from now on as well. The only place that God is going to hear your prayers is if you pray

them on Sunday mornings, here in this room, at Grace Covenant Church. So you can stop praying before you go to bed at night or before a meal or when somebody asks you for prayer. Just stop because God is not going to hear those prayers. You have to be right here, saying those prayers to God. And you can't go directly to Him, okay. We are going to need a pastor there with you to make sure that those prayers ultimately get to God. Everybody with me on these new ways we are going to be relating to God here at Grace? No? Is anybody coming back next week? Not very many of us.

Before you start running for the doors, let me say that I think today is a great day to be at Grace Covenant Church. The reason I say that is because today we are going to be talking about the truth that isn't just a flag that we fly here at Grace. This truth is one of the foundations that this church is built upon. So if you are new to Grace or you are visiting us for the first time or you are trying to figure out if this is going to be your church family, then I hope that this morning will give you a little bit of a deeper understanding about who Grace Covenant Church is, why we do what we do, and what we really care about. I hope you will decide to make Grace your church family.

This experience I just set out a few moments ago – essentially this is what the Church looked like, how the Church operated for the first 1500 years after Jesus established the Church. It was just 500 years ago that Christians were really liberated from some of the regulations and many others that I just put in place this morning.

You can grab your Bible out from under your chair if you haven't done so yet.

This is what the Church looked like for well over a millennium. This is how the system was set up.



The only person who could get to God, who was heard by God, who had access to God was a Priest. So if you wanted to get to God, you could not go directly to Him. You didn't have that kind of access. You would have to go to a priest who would then take your confessions or prayers or requests to God.

But it didn't just stop there. It worked the other direction too. If God wanted to get to you, He would have to go through a Priest as well.

God



Priest



You

So you would have to be in Church on a Sunday morning and you would have to hear from God through a Priest. You could not hear directly from Him. Even God's Word would have been kept from you. It would have been in the hands of Priests only. If you did get your hands on a Bible, then there is a good chance you either could not read it or that it was in a language that you could not read if you did read. So, if you wanted to hear from God, you would have to be sitting right here and hear it through a Priest or Pastor. This is the way the Church was set up. If you wanted to get to God, you had to go through a Priest. For God to get to you, He had to go through a Priest.

You have to understand that this is not necessarily a wrong way for Church to take place. The problem with it is that it was old, outdated because this was a carry over from the Old Testament model. In this Old Testament model, the people of God could not have direct access to God. They needed a Priest, a middleman operating between them and God. The reason was because of sin. They had sin, unholiness that they could not do anything about. Because they had this unholiness that kept them from the presence of God, they had to have a mediator. So God gave them that, a mediator, a middleman who could go between man and God. It was not that it was absolutely wrong; it was just old, a thing of the past. When Jesus came, He changed all that. But for 1500 years, that is where the Church was.

Even when you look at the Old Testament priesthood, what you find is that it was a very select few that were in that group. You had to be from one of the twelve tribes of Israel. You had to be from the tribe of Levi. Even then, you couldn't just be a regular Levite; you had to be from the family line of Aaron, Moses' brother, if you were going to be a priest. But even then, if you had some kind of physical deformity or disability, then you were disqualified. Once you became a priest, from the line of Aaron, you could not shave your head; you could not trim your beard; you could not be around anything that was dead. You couldn't even have a cut on your body or it would have to heal before you would be able to fulfill your duties as a priest. These requirements that God had set in place were there to point to something very important, that was the perfection and the holiness of this God that these priests served.

So, can you imagine just for a moment what it must have been like to be one of these priests in the Old Testament? Can you imagine being one of those select few that God had chosen and appointed to be this mediator between Him and His people? I imagine there might have been some embarrassment by

being one of those people. *Why am I different than everybody else, God? Why do I have this kind of responsibility, this kind of job description? It is heavy.* I imagine it must have been humbling, to have been born into the family business and the family business was talking to God. The family business was talking to people about God, too. Your job was to talk to God on behalf of people who were in need. Your job was to extend God's forgiveness to people who needed that forgiveness because they were carrying around guilt and shame – trapped by it. Your job would have been to communicate God's love and His truth to people who didn't know it. That is a heavy job description.

I don't know what would have been weirder, to be one of these priests, one of these select few, or to be everybody else who needed a mediator, a middleman in order to have any kind of meaningful relationship or interaction with God. I think that would have been odd, to have needed somebody in order to get to God and God to need somebody to get to me.

When you think about it, you certainly realize just how transcendent and how unapproachable God must have seemed – and not just seemed but really have been to the majority of His people. He could not get to them without a mediator and they could not get to Him without that mediator. I will bet that God felt very distant to the vast majority of people.

Then came the day that the universe changed, the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the day when angels and demons would gasp because from that day forward, every Christian, every believer would have the Spirit of God residing in them. From that day forward, man would never need a mediator, a human to go between him and God. This God who was transcendent and otherworldly and out there suddenly showed himself to be imminent, right here, to be within us, and we would not need a mediator ever again.

That is why Peter was able to write some of the most powerful words that have ever been written about who we are as Christians in 1 Peter 2:9. This is what Peter says about who we are as believers – because the death and resurrection of Christ has washed away our sins. Because God resides in us, this is who we are now.

1 Peter 2:9 You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Isn't that a great verse? There is power in those words, isn't there? I don't have any tattoos but if I were going to get a tattoo, that might be the verse I would put on myself permanently. There is so much in that verse. Peter is not just talking to one person but this is a plural you. What he is saying is *y'all* are a chosen people, a royal priesthood. He says it four times: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's

special possession. He is asking us – do you get it? He says, everything has changed. This is how The Message version says it:

You are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do His work and to speak out for Him, to tell others of the night and day difference He made for you.

Here is the truth of these passages – the truth is that we no longer need a priest and we don't need a mediator because Jesus' death and resurrection has wiped away our sins and we have access to the presence of God now. We have the Spirit of God residing within us. So, now we are priests. Each one of us is one of God's priests. That is what Peter is trying to convince us of – that we as priests are part of the family business. We are born into the family business. The family business is talking to God and it is talking to people about God. It is praying to God on behalf of people in need. It is extending God's forgiveness to people who are trapped by guilt and shame. It is communicating God's love and His truth to people who don't know it. That is what we get to do now because we are now God's priests. We are part of His royal priesthood.

The truth of this fact that we are now priests, every believer is a minister has enormous implications for our lives. I want to talk to you about a few of those implications.

First, we can now draw near to God in conversation. It is so simple and yet it is incredible, that we get to The Almighty Creator of the universe whenever we want to and wherever we are. We don't have to be here or have somebody to do that for us. We can just talk to Him. What is wild to think about is that the most powerful being in the universe wants us to converse with Him, that He wants to hear from us, that He gave us His Spirit so that He could talk to us too. He just wants to have a conversation with you and wants you to be listening to Him. We get to converse with our God now.

Second, we get to draw near to God not just in conversation but also in His Word. In Scripture, we get to draw near to God and come close to Him. It has only been 500 of the last 4000 years that Christians and believers had the Word of God in their hands, in their language, and they can read it whenever they want. We get to be a part of God's Word now. We get to understand who He is, personally, and who we are as we go through His Word.

There was a man named John Wycliffe who had this vision, dream [1300s] that one day his kids and his grandkids and every single person on this planet would have the Word of God in their language and they could read it on their own. That was what he dreamed of. It was because of John Wycliffe that we have this Bible in English; he was the first one to translate it into English. There is a missions organization that you may know about, Wycliffe Bible Translators, based on this man and his life and

ministry. Their goal, mission is to translate the Bible into every language on the face of this earth. They have done that with 700 different languages but their job is not done. They have another 2000 languages that they are trying to get the Word of God translated into so that those 350 million people can have access to God's Word too.

So you see, we get to come to God's Word because of the ministry of John Wycliffe and what God has done. So let's take this Word home and enjoy it, that we get to convene and commune with God and His Word in a way that 1000s of years of believers were not able to. They could not do that but we can now.

Finally, each one of us can draw near to God as His priests now because our sins have been wiped away and because the Holy Spirit lives within us. Peter said in verse 9 of 1 Peter 2,

1 Peter 2:9 We are priests *so that* we may declare the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

That is our job description and we get to do that now. God has given us this opportunity to declare His excellencies. God is so smart. The way to reach the whole world isn't to have a select few that are His priests; it was to make *every* Christian a priest. That is the way you reach the whole world about the excellencies of God.

So, think about this for a moment. If we are God's priests, that means that wherever we go, people are not just experiencing us but they are experiencing God because they are experiencing one of God's priests whenever they experience us. It means that whenever your family and friends are around you, wherever you are, they are participating in a worship service that you are preceding over as one of God's priests. So, I want you to think about what is that experience like for the people you spend time around? What is that church service like that they are a part of when they are around you, as one of God's ministers, one of God's priests? What is that like for them?

I will be ridiculous for a second. Let's say you walked in here this morning and I was up here cussing like a sailor and showing violent and risqué movies on the screen and drinking until I couldn't see straight? Let's say that was happening. You would have a pretty low opinion of me but you would also probably leave here with a pretty low opinion of God, too, wouldn't you? Because that is where you experience God is in a church service and that is where family and friends of ours are experiencing God as well. So I want you to think, ask yourself this question: What do other people understand and know and think about God after they have spent few hours with me – one of His priests? Would you say these words to yourself: I am one of God's priests. Why don't you say it out loud together: I am one of God's priests. Turn to the person next to you and tell them: You are one of God's priests.

Look, this is a life changing, revolutionary way to view life. It really is. When God's people, when we see ourselves as ministers, as His priests, then the world around us changes. The people around us are absolutely changed. It is the truth. Even in our student ministry right now, we are seeing students who are figuring this out. They are seeing, beginning to believe, that they are God's priests. They are sent to their schools and their teams and their clubs and other organizations to declare the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

There is the 7th grade guy who just recently asked for a Bible so that he could give it to one of his buddies at school. This buddy of his did not have a Bible, never studied the Bible on his own. This 7th grade guy wanted to be able to read the Bible with his friend and to give him this Bible so they could study it together. He believes that God has selected him, chosen him to go into that school and be one of His ministers. He believes that he is one of God's priests, doesn't he? There is no other way to explain that.

We have a high school junior who recently led one of her friends to Christ. She prayed that prayer of salvation with her friend. But even more importantly, she had been praying for this friend long before that prayer of salvation was ever prayed – because she is one of God's priests. This friend of hers had been in a worship service in this club they are in together with this junior in high school for a long time. She had been experiencing God through one of His priests. That is what happened. She decided she wanted to be a part of this, a follower of Christ. This is good stuff. So, this junior believes that she is a minister of God, one of God's priests sent to that club to declare His excellencies.

The high school junior that is on the football team, whenever his teammates are looking for somebody to pray for them because they are going through something tough, when they have difficult questions about God that they have never been able to find out an answer to, when they just need some good advise -- they don't go looking for a pastor. No, they just go and find their local priest, a fellow 16-year-old teammate on their football team. That is who they go to because this junior just believes he is one of God's priests, sent to that football team to be a minister there. He just happens to play football on the side but that is really what he is there to do and that is why those guys go to him. He is the local priest there. He believes he is one of God's priests.

So look – if our teenagers are doing this, if this is how God is using our teenagers, it is how He is going to use us. If they can do it, then we can certainly do it. How do you do that? You have to believe you are one of God's priests. This fall, why don't you think about work like this perhaps. Why don't you think of yourself, believing "I am in this job to be the office chaplain". Whatever you do 9 to 5 is what you do on the side; what God has placed me here to do is to be the chaplain of this office. So, when a co-

worker comes to you and shares that they are having a difficult time in their marriage with their spouse, you can say to them what a priest would say. You can say: *Look, would you be okay if I talk to God about what you shared with me? Could we do that right now? Could I talk to God about your marriage with you right now? Would that be okay? I love talking to God. Can I bring this to Him?* You just have to believe you are one of God's priests. Or maybe you could start seeing yourself this fall as the local pastor on your neighborhood block. You are the family, the house where people can go to when they are in need, whether it be an extra egg for a recipe or a listening ear. You could become the family that neighbors trust with their kids in an emergency. You just have to believe that you are one of God's ministers, one of His priests sent to that neighborhood, not just to live there but to minister to those neighbors.

I think that we, as believers, and as priests, we are going to have amazing opportunities if we are praying for them and looking for them to speak the very words of God to people who need to hear them. James says to confess your sins to one another. I think God has set us up so that we could say the words that He would say himself to people who need to hear it. You could say to somebody who is entrapped by sin and guilty over sin from their past, what God would say to them. You could say: You are forgiven. You could speak the words of Jesus and say: I release you from this sin from your past. They may still have consequences to face because of those decisions but they will face those consequences with a soul that has been set free. That would be incredible; that is a light load. You could speak the words of Jesus to the people because you are one of His priests. He has given you that opportunity, that responsibility.

So, let's get really practical as we close down today. I want us to think real practical about how we can be priests this fall, specifically over the next two months. This is what I want to ask you to do – to think about two friends that God has brought into your life that you could be a priest to over the next two months. This is a friend who you do not believe is a follower of Christ, that you could go deeper with over these next two months. Who would that be for you? Maybe it is a co-worker or a neighbor or an old friend from high school or college or a former job that you had. Maybe it is a teammate. Who are those two people for you? Once you have them, I want you to take out your bulletin and take the sermon notes page and at the top write down those two names and then skip down to the bottom and write those same two names again.

Then I have two things I would like to have you do with that.

First tear off the bottom part of that sermon notes page and before you leave the Worship Center today I want to ask you to hand that slip of paper with those two names on it to somebody you know and say: These are the two people I am going to be a priest to over these next two months. This is who I am going to be looking to minister to. That is the first thing.

Second, I want to ask you to consider asking those two friends to come over to your house and experience a dinner with you and your family. Invite the two names separately, maybe have September 19 as the deadline for one of those friends, and have October 19 as the second deadline. Maybe even write those dates next to the names. Ask them to come over for dinner. Here is what I think could happen. As they come into your house and experience that you are one of God's priests, I think they will see that, first of all, it is real life to be a follower of Christ. But they will also experience the tranquility and the peace of soul that God achieves in the lives of His priests – even when the kids are crying and screaming and hitting and all that, they will still be able to see that. So bring them into your home; invite them over for an evening. Be praying: God, open up an opportunity to have a great conversation, a spiritual conversation about You with each of these friends in the next two months. He will do that. He cares a lot more about that than you do. So ask Him to help you with that.

Or you might even consider with those two friends to invite them here this fall because this fall we are going to be going through the book of Ephesians. We are going to spend a few weeks going through the first two chapters of Ephesians and there is staggering doctrine in those first two chapters. But then in October we are going to get to the topics of marriage and family, talking through some real life issues and what God has to say about how those things ought to look. This would be a great series for them to be at Grace for. You could even get creative and go to mass with them on Saturday night and invite them to Grace on Sunday morning with you.

Here is the last thing I want to say. This is a great church, a church that gets “Every Believer is a Minister” and that we are all God's priests. I know so many of you who don't just know this but you are living this out because you believe that you are one of God's priests, that you are here to minister to people that you greet and shake hands with on Sunday morning – but you are also out there sharing Jesus' love and His truth with people outside the walls of Grace. I think God is so pleased with that, with Grace.

Let's go to Him right now in prayer. I'm going to give you a moment to pray for those two friends that you are going to be a priest to over these next two months. If you have not come up with somebody yet, then pray and ask God to show you who He wants you to be a priest to. Then I will close us in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

We are so honored to be your priests, your ministers sent into our world and where You have placed us to declare your excellencies, this God of ours who has called us out of darkness and into your marvelous light.

Lord, I pray for courage for each one of us as we think about who these two friends might be who we might be a priest to over these next two months.

I pray that You would go before us and tenderize and soften their hearts to hear your truth and to experience your love. I pray you would give us the words to say just at the right time, right when we need them, through your Spirit who resides in us. I pray you would do that, Lord.

I pray You would receive all glory and all honor as we are out there being one of your priests, Lord, conducting these worship services wherever we go, that your name might be glorified and others might come to know you. We pray that in your Son's name. Amen.