

1 Peter 2:9a Priests and salt Matthew 5:10-16

This week's subject is close to that of last week. Then we spoke about the church as resident aliens, people in exile, a minority. Today we speak about the church as a priesthood. Last week we saw that the church has no power on earth, yet it is an influence for good. Today we think about how this influence for good works. We see that Jesus calls the church 'salt of the earth' and Peter calls us 'a priesthood'.

We Baptists often talk about the priesthood of all believers. But what does that mean? What is actually priesthood in the New Testament?

1. In the Old Testament priests made sacrifices on behalf of the people. These sacrifices were good in their time, but they are no longer necessary because Jesus was our perfect sacrifice. That is also why in our church there is no altar. There's no more need for priests making sacrifices.
2. Yet in the church we are priests. All are priests, not just some. Not the minister alone, or the minister and the other leaders. All are! That means that all in the church are equal. 'Priesthood' is a collective term: it refers to the community of the church, not to individuals.
3. Yet in the world we as believers are a minority. As priests we are mediators between God and the majority of humankind, the world. We are go-betweens between God and the people. We represent the world to God and God to the world. From God we bring blessing to the world. We seek the welfare of the city (Jeremiah 29). On behalf of the people we bring to God intercessions, worship and lamentations.
4. Priests can only function in a situation of solidarity: we are solidary with the world as we approach God. In the same way Jesus is solidary with us in his role as high priest (Hebrews 2).
5. What does this mean in practice?
 - Christians should have loving relationships with their neighbours, relatives, colleagues and friends; only in that way can they show God to them and be solidary with them.
 - Do we serve and love the people around us? As Jesus would do if he were here?!
 - Do we bless those who are hurting?
 - Do we give our time, energy, money? Are we available to serve?
 - Are our lives exemplary?
6. Our priesthood is a conserving influence in the world. In this sense we are salt of the earth. Salt is a preservative. Christians as salt are an influence for good in society. As William Temple said: 'The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.'