

Sacred Ground - Commission Prayer

1 Peter 2:9-10

Last Sunday evening I received this email from Pastor Nelson Pervaz, known to many of us for his mission work among Urdu speaking people here in Melbourne, and for his involvement with Home Church Pakistan.

Pastor Nelson's email was short and to the point:

Dear brothers and sisters in this situation, I request you to please pray for Christians in Pakistan, prayer for their protection, safety and urgent needs.

The Xinhua news agency reported: Hundreds of angry protestors on Saturday set ablaze more than 100 houses of Pakistani Christians in Lahore over a blasphemy row. Over 3,000 Muslim protestors turned violent over derogatory remarks allegedly made by a young Christian against Prophet Mohammed in a Christian neighbourhood in Badami Bagh area. (Xinhua Photo/Sajjad)

Graphic photos captured the unfolding events.



Demonstrators set fire to Christian homes.

A Pakistani demonstrator torches belongings of Christian families during the protest.





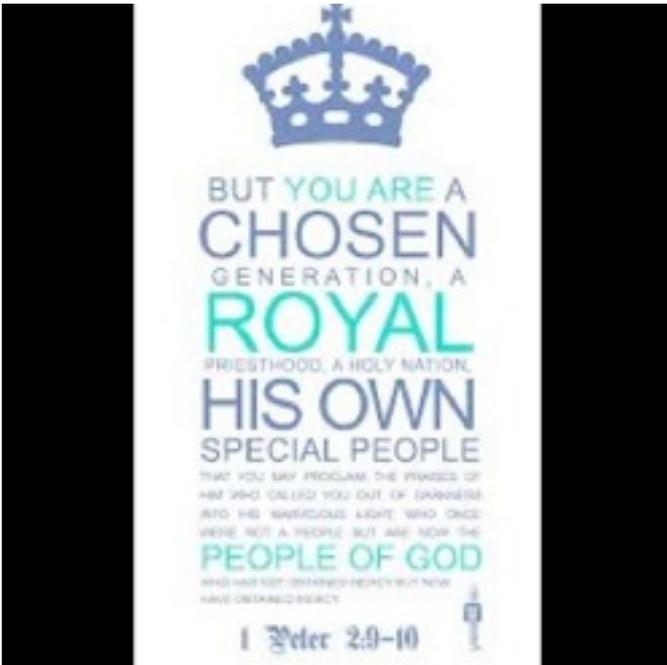
Christian businesses were not spared either



Pakistani Christians visit their burnt-out homes

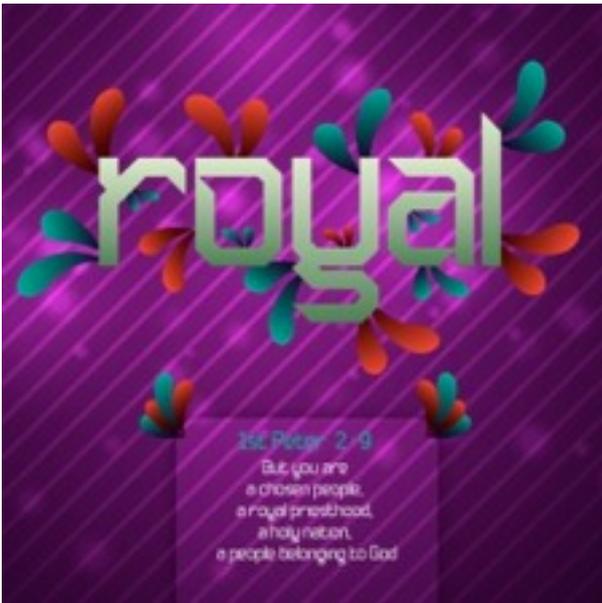
This is but one story of the way that Christians are mistreated and persecuted in many parts of the world. What should our reaction be? Certainly, there is anger at the injustice experienced by our brothers and sisters in Christ. There's

disgust at the inaction of the government in Pakistan. But above all, though, there's one reaction that is the most appropriate, and that is to pray. To petition our Father in heaven to protect his servants who confess his name under difficult circumstances. To pray for those who have inflicted this indignity, that they might repent of their actions and come to know Jesus, the Prince of Peace. To ask God to make justice flow through the courts and in the government of the nation of Pakistan.



This isn't just a good idea. This is our calling as God's people. This is what we are commissioned to do. Listen to what the Apostle Peter says: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. "

Peter doesn't use the word prayer here, but it's implicit in one of the title he gives us: royal priesthood. This name goes back to the Old Testament, where God told his covenant people: "Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." We know that God set apart Aaron and his ancestors to serve the community as priests: their calling was to offer sacrifices on behalf of God's people, and to intercede for God's people.



But God had in mind that each of his chosen people had a priestly role in their own lives. Through each person God expands the reach of his kingdom into the whole world. This is what Peter picks up in the New Testament. We are a “a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We do this through living lives of sacrificial love. That’s what we see today in the way Mary lavishes love on Jesus by anointing his feet with perfume and wiping his feet with her hair. But we also see this love in the Mary that her sister Mary serves dinner to the assembled guests.

Priests live sacrificially, and they also intercede for other people. Prayer is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. Peter describes us a royal priesthood. We are sons and daughters of

the king. John Kleinig describes it like this: “Imagine that you received a written invitation from the Prime Minister to join her administration as a minister of any portfolio you wished to run. You would be a member of her cabinet, having immediate access to her. You would have a say in the administration of this land and would help to decide how its resources were distributed. Think of all the good that you could do.”

This is exactly the position that each of us has through our baptism. We know God on a first name basis. We know what God is up to through what his Son Jesus has taught us. We’ve been fully briefed on our Father’s policy. And so we are privileged to carry out God’s will in the world because he has shared his rule, his power and authority with us. Prayer is the way that we bring our affairs, and the affairs of our world before God for his involvement and his action. Each of us has a particular area of responsibility: our family, our network of friends, our local neighbourhood, and all of us together have a responsibility for the bigger picture: our state and nation, and the world; people and places who live under difficult circumstances; our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer for confessing Christ.



PRAY
BIG

The church models this kind of prayer in the Prayer of the Church. Here we pray big: for the church, for the world, and also for each other. Together we think far beyond our own personal concerns, and we intercede for all people. All God’s people are entrusted with the task of worshipping God on behalf of all the people and all the nations of the world. We worship for, and we pray for those who don’t believe in God or won’t believe. This is what Jesus commits us to do in the Sermon on the Mount: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who persecute you; pray for those who mistreat you.”

God certainly wants us to pray for our personal concerns, for those nearest and dearest to us, for members of this church too. But he also wants us to pray big; to remember the world outside these church doors, and the world across the waves; all the people of the world and the circumstances they face. Paul says to us: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Dania reminded us in her Sacred Ground Devotion Book this week: "Intercession is truly universal work for the Christian. No place is closed to prayer. No continent – no nation – no organisation – no city – no office. There is no power on earth that can keep intercession out."

So go and pray big. This is your commission. Amen.