

Exodus 39:1–43

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, and I want to bring my special welcome to those of you who might be new to the neighborhood, perhaps moving into Hyde Park and wondering what the future holds for you.

We sincerely hope that this will be a family for you. Consider us your living room. And I know relationships take some time, but we invite you sincerely to come on to the church picnic this Wednesday.

You just go underneath Lakeshore Drive at 55th, and there will be people there to direct you and begin to get to know you. So we are glad that you're here. Well, what we wear, like it or not, does two things.

Our clothing both reveals identity and expresses one's identity.

Think about it. Clothing reveals identity by conveying to others something perhaps of a role that you have.

[1 : 1 1] A police officer, a postal worker, a UPS driver is known immediately by what he or she is wearing.

In the medical profession, at least so I have read, doctors, residents who are attending wear white coats. Medical students wear white coats with med school logos on them.

RNs wear green scrubs, nurse practitioners, blue scrubs. PAs, purple scrubs, nurse assistants, multicolored gowns.

And those who are assisting, even in the outside desk area or triage, are known by their dark blue outfits. Whether that is still the case or not, I am not clear.

But you can imagine in the hallway of a hospital, immediately recognizing someone by way of identity, the role they have based upon what they wear.

[2 : 1 4] Clothing plays other roles too. Not merely the utilitarian function of identifying someone's role, but it is an expression of identity.

In other words, what we wear is not always connected to our role, but who we are as a person. Or, the person we want to be.

Or, perhaps the person we want others to think we are. And yet we know we are not. If you want to break into the world of advertising, you'll be told that dress is important.

How you dress will either help you or hurt you. Ready to go on a job interview? Somebody will tell you what. Don't dress for the job you're getting.

Dress for the job you want. I can think of, perhaps, a young woman being invited out to dinner.

[3 : 2 8] She's a young woman being invited. And the mindset that she has been taught. Looks immediately at the man's shoes. And she remembers someone somewhere once saying, the shoes make the man.

Do I say yes to this invitation or not? We're surprised at someone's capacity to grow in their identity.

Wow! You sure clean up good. In Exodus 39, both aspects are in play. I hope you have your eyes on the text.

The holy garments both identify the priest's role, role, and as we're going to see, they also create a covering for him that in some ironic way is identified as an expression of his very person.

So what does the garment convey to you, to me, about role? As you heard it read this morning, it was exquisite. You might have thought long and boring.

[4 : 39] But particular, detailed, at times wonderfully humorous, a bell and a pomegranate.

A bell and a pomegranate. Taking its time to display the glories of the garment. In other words, when we heard the reading read, we began to understand that whatever role the high priest had in Israel, it was not a casual role.

The one who stood as the mediator between God and his people played some important role, and all the dress signified that elaborate splendor.

This is not a pullover. This is not a hoodie. This is not a two-button sport coat. This is not a three-piece suit. This was nothing less than a six-fold work of created splendor.

For 31 verses. Almost a careful and complete creation account. Six objects.

[5 : 54] Like six days. Not a story of the creation of the world. But simply outlining in beautiful detail what the priest would wear, who would bring the world back into relationship to its maker.

And so, simply put, you begin to watch the garment made. Verses 2 to 5, the ephod. Think of it almost as an apron between the knees and the waist, but with suspenders like that go over it, and through the back and around, with an interior clasp perhaps.

Like decent braces one would buy at Brooks Brothers today. The emphasis is on this beautiful shoulder pieces, which have a sense of beauty, and there's gold, and there's blue, and there's purple, and there's scarlet.

In those four verses, the repetition of the colors comes no fewer than three times. The writer not wanting you to miss this is a garment of striking beauty.

You would recognize it on the street immediately. Dressed to show. Hammered out gold leaf.

[7 : 29] Actually stitched into the garment. The ephod. A glorious covering for the high priest. Followed by the anux stones.

In chapter 35 and verse 27, we learned earlier that it was the leaders who actually brought these stones. And you also learn in an earlier part of Exodus that they did it as the Lord commanded, namely that there were two stones on either shoulder and engraved in the stones, each stone, the names of six tribes of the sons of Israel.

So the weight of the people are on the shoulders of the priest as he goes about his duty. I mean, their names are skyward. As though God Himself, when looking down upon the priest, reads the very names of the people for whom all this mediation is taking place.

And then verses 8 to 21, the largest section given by way of language to the holy garments is the breast piece. I mean, imagine right across the chest four rows of stones, three stones each, and precious stones they were, including amethyst, which I mentioned because it's the traditional stone of anyone who's been married 33 years.

I know these things. The breast piece had these stones right across the front of the priest between himself and the sacrificial work going.

[9 : 20] And it says earlier in chapter 29 that it was a breast piece of judgment. It uses that word twice. In other words, that the judgment that was to rightly fall upon these people was actually being mediated through this work and falling upon the sacrificial offering.

attached to the ephod with two gold rings, two cords of gold. And then the robe, verses 22 to 26, indicated by a hole at the front, you know, that you would pull over.

And notice, all hemmed in so as not to rip or to tear. And then bells, literally, they were golden balls that fell just above the floor so that as the priest would walk, the waving motion would produce the sound of the bell.

And earlier in Exodus, it indicates so that when they went into the holy place or into the holy of holies, they would not die. As if they were indicating to God, I'm coming.

Prepare to look away. You can hear me. I know you cannot look on me. But you have provided for my presence through this very robe.

[10 : 50] And then the coats and the caps. I love that part in 27 to 29. In chapter 28, verse 40, we were told that you made the coats and the caps, quote, you shall make them for glory and beauty.

Notice, nothing utilitarian about them. This is a wonderful word for anyone here who likes to create. If you feel like you were born to create, no doubt you're tired of those who are so ensconced, fixed, like old fixtures in a house, to everything having to have utilitarian purpose.

But no, these caps and coats were made simply for glory and beauty. They had no function.

And God wanted them. Years ago now, years ago, I worked for a pastor who wanted, architecturally, the corner of the building they were putting up to be anchored by a freestanding tower with a steeple.

It was a significant amount of money. And at the congregational meeting, believe me, it was hotly debated. And I was just a young man listening to the utilitarian spiritualists of the congregation wanting to excise from the architectural drawings any freestanding structure that had no function.

[12 : 35] A waste of money like Judas that could have been given to the poor. And the pastor simply said, well, we can do that.

Architecturally, the entire structure just falls off the corner into nothingness. It's there for the glory and the symmetry and the beauty of the whole.

The whole thing doesn't really work without it. Well, only an artist can say that, but the artist knows. And God is evidently an artist of sorts.

Make the coats and the caps. Well, what are they for, God? Oh, they're for glory and for beauty. And so they were made. And then the crown, 30 and 31.

Don't you love how it ends on that sixth day? A crowning feature, pure gold, a turban with engraved across it, right across the forehead of the one who would wear it as the high priest, holy to the Lord.

[13 : 46] and it was indicated earlier in Exodus that it was there to bear any guilt of those who came with offerings. So if you came to the high priest, you had felt like you had said your prayers, but you knew that God required blood for your sins.

You would bring the priest to your offering and that holy to the Lord would indicate to God on high that the offerings of his people were actually acceptable as the priest wore all of this in his presence.

If you take all of those verses together, chapter 39, 1 to 31, probably a text you've never heard read out loud or preached from before, they certainly indicate a splendid and elaborate garment that identified the role of the high priest.

And that role was beautiful. That role was wondrous. That role was intended to bear all the sinful weight of the people of God before their maker.

He wore that weight on his shoulders. He wore that weight across his chest. He called upon God to view the sacrifice as holy as he looked upon what was in front of his forehead.

[15 : 10] when Yahweh was to look then upon the splendor of the garments which we have just seen, he would be compelled to look away from their sin and take glory in what they had brought.

Well, what do we do with this? From the vantage point of a Christian, I want to talk for a few minutes about two things that I've been meditating on.

First, there's a real irony in Exodus with Aaron as the high priest. I mean, you put these threads on Aaron as they will do in the next chapter, and you are left with a strong impression of a disconnect between the role he performs and the person he is.

The function that he fulfilled among the people of God was awesome, but this is Aaron, and we all know his true self.

In other words, the holy garments may identify Aaron's task, but they couldn't possibly be an expression of his identity. He wasn't dressing to express who he was.

[16 : 37] He dressed to indicate what role he played. If you've been following along in the story, you already know that Aaron is play-acting here.

He's in full dress-up mode. He's found the drawer. He's pulled out the garment. He's parading up and down the hallway of your home.

But for any of the adults hanging around, it's all a bit quite humorous to have seen Aaron in these garments.

Do you remember the offhand comment that I believe chapter 32 closed with? Yeah, a wonderful word. Right on the heels of the golden calf incident, the narrator wants to give you the identity of Aaron and make it clear.

Verse 30 5, then the Lord sent a plague on the people because they made the calf, not period, but comma, and following the comma, the one that Aaron made.

[17 : 47] Setting himself apart. Do I need to remind you that the blood, the blood of the sacrifices needed to be applied to the priests themselves, on their person, and on their garments?

that by the time he went in to actually begin exercising this, it had already been stained with blood, ruined as it were, but actually protected for him, given who he was?

Don't miss it. When you look back and read about the instructions in chapter 28 about what Aaron and his sons were to wear, notice what happens in 29.

There's a whole chapter given to blood that has to consecrate these guys and what they're putting on. Why? Because Aaron is just like the rest of us.

There's a real irony in Exodus with Aaron. Secondly, there's a real absence of Aaron in the New Testament. Stay with me on this for a moment.

[18 : 54] The New Testament makes very little use of Aaron. From what I could see in the concordance it mentions him only four times and each mention, I believe, is negative in nature.

Luke chapter 1, Aaron is mentioned, but it's not recalling Aaron or his sons. Actually, it turns away from Aaron and his sons to highlight a woman who came from his line that will out distance in faith her husband who actually serves in the temple.

It's a negative expression. Acts chapter 7, Aaron comes into play, but it's in reference to his role with the golden calf. Hebrews chapter 8, Aaron comes into play, but it's in reference to his repeated services actually as being something that's going by the way of obsolescence.

Aaron, the obsolete one. And then finally, the only positive mention I could find was in Hebrews chapter 5, but even there, it wasn't a reference regarding the identity of Aaron.

It was a reference about God. God called Aaron. And that's as good as you get in the New Testament on Aaron. That's it.

[20 : 12] There's an irony here in Exodus that he's wearing these things given what we know of him, and there's an absence of him in the New Testament. Let me put it as clearly as I can.

When the New Testament writers begin to think about using Aaron and even his clothing, they're decidedly against him. There are no overt references to this material that are used positively to construe Aaron as like, oh, you got Aaron back there?

Yay, we got Jesus here! No, they don't do that. They don't do Aaron, yes, Jesus, better. No, they don't do that. that's a surprise.

The furniture's there in the New Testament. The sacrifices are all there, the things he actually did. There's even a mention of the service of the high priest, but of the garments themselves, and of Aaron in particular, anything typological that would bring you into Christianity through Exodus 39 is absent.

just when you expect the New Testament to grab hold of the rich imagery put forward in the garments, they have nothing to say.

[21 : 35] I looked. Maybe you can correct me and find something along the way. And just when you think that the apostolic writers would have turned to this text and made hay on it with Jesus, they just let it lie there like a fallow field, nothing to do with chapter 39.

In fact, when they could have referenced chapter 39, they go back to Exodus 15 or forward to Psalm 110 instead. They don't even want Aaron, they want Melchizedek when they think of a great high priest.

Aaron cannot possibly represent the identity of the Savior, and the gospel writers are no different than the epistles. If you've never read Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, you read of a very different kind of mediator.

You want to conceive of it as clothing? Let me give it to you. Where Aaron had his ephod, Jesus has only a loin cloth.

Where Aaron's shoulders, the stones, Jesus carries a cross. Where Aaron gets a beautiful breast piece and covering, Jesus is uncovered, whipped, and his ribcage laid bare.

[23 : 11] Where Aaron walks out under that splendid robe, the soldiers put one on Jesus that only intended mockery.

Where Aaron had his turban, Jesus a crown of thorns. Let me put it to you this way, if you're not a reader of the Bible, the apostles who wrote the New Testament, the gospel writers themselves, they have all uniformly gone out of their way to tell you this, Jesus is not like Aaron, at least by way of comparison, perhaps he's there by way of contrast.

And nowhere is the contrast as complete as it is in Hebrews 7. Let me read just these couple of verses to you. Verse 26 of Hebrews 7, for it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, that is Jesus, in other words, you want a fitting room?

Well, it's fitting that we get a high priest who is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

He has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

[24 : 39] The law, what we're reading, appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath which came later than the law, that's a reference to Psalm 110 and the high order of the one like Melchizedek, that word of an oath appointed a son who has been made perfect forever.

Let me see if I can get this then cleaned up for us. Holy garments were needed for Aaron because Aaron was decidedly not.

Jesus never came all dressed up. Nothing externally pleasant about him. Start reading about Jesus, you get no song, you get no dance.

Fortunately, you get no dress up either. just the cold, hard work of real mediation between God and man. This makes the scenes of Jesus in my mind in his 33rd year when he's standing before Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests, especially potent.

Here are the ones who are role-playing the part and questioning this itinerant impoverished preacher and ensuring that if he says anything amiss, he's actually struck in their presence with all of that splendor before them and all of that holiness upon them and the real mediator stands only to do the work given to him.

[26 : 46] Let me wrap it up, this 31 verses. When you think about the garments as I've been thinking about them this week, here's the way I put it. Exodus 31, this is no pretty pool side cover-up.

this is just our naked sinful selves covered. This is nothing on the outside.

This is everything on the inside. In other words, when you get to Jesus and the New Testament, you finally get the real thing you need. You get one that there's no pretension with Jesus.

Isn't that great? I've been thinking about this this week. What's the takeaway for some of you listening to me today? I would think that Hyde Park would be a place where we would find lots of people ready to become Christian.

Why? I've lived in Hyde Park 20 years. This area, Southside in general, we don't like pretension. Call a spade a spade.

[27 : 50] We don't care how you dress it up. We just want the real deal. This Jesus actually has what I would call kind of like a Hyde Park glory to him. I'm serious.

We treasure the fact that we've got Nobel Prize winners walking down alleys being mistaken for homeless bums. We love that. We love it.

We've got people who don't have a high school education staying in our midst week in, week out, and they know the Bible backward and forward, and we've got the brightest students in the world coming in learning the first things about Jesus.

We love that. It just lays us all out. We're all in the same boat. Well, I love Jesus because I don't like pretty poolside cover-ups.

I guess what's amazing to me is to see people today and young people, particularly in a world I came out of, I represent in some sense, a world of kind of conservative evangelicalism between the ages of, you know, 17 and 35 at the moment.

[29 : 14] I'm kind of watching what's swirling, what do people want coming in and out of that world, and all of a sudden I just am stunned that people are wanting a return to the external garb of religiosity.

Pastors donning robes, swinging incense, wearing some golden sash. You're not going to get that at a holy trinity. What a mess. You know, you can learn a lot about a church by just looking at their platform.

You really can. I've been online. I start punching up people's sermons. You can learn a lot about the culture of a people by looking at the platform they attend.

We had guys out here today weed in the garden. Don't you love that? That's like the church out there, you know. It's the only living expression you're going to get. Some race school custodian weed in the garden before the kids get back.

Meanwhile, you're trying to sing praises to the Lord. Doesn't get any better than that. I'm not going to make much of pastoral garments.

[30 : 32] I am no mediator. All the dressing up I could only do would misplace your vision. You do not need a church that recreates the external visible manifestations of the ironic priesthood.

It's all dress up. Look to Jesus. He alone saves. And it's ugly and it's simple and it's plain.

It's somewhat along the lines of why Paul said, I knew nothing among you but Christ and him crucified. God died. Because their appetite was for something else.

Aaron's elaborate threads were needed as external symbols that would point to a desired internal effect. But Aaron's garments were needed because what we can see he was decidedly unholy.

Today I'm speaking to pastors, future pastors, some of you. Fine linen clothing and clerical cover-ups may do something to hide priestly!

[31 : 56] priestly imperfections. But I can't help but think that the pastor who chooses to wear them won't have the unintended consequence of diverting his people's attention from what they read about Jesus in the good book to the person that they see standing behind the pulpit.

Want to dress for success? If you must, then put on the Geneva gown. But better yet, get a black undershirt, wear something dark, and talk about the glories of Good Friday where sin is done away with.

What about the people? Look at the way the chapter ends. And with this I'll find my seat. Interestingly, verses 32 to the end moves from the holy garments to the completed work.

Did you catch it? The repetition of the phrase throughout the whole chapter? Ten times over. Completeness. Ten times over as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Everything was done as it had been commanded to be done. It was completed. It was all done just as it was supposed to be done. Nothing was amiss when it was done.

[33 : 20] To the smallest detail it was done, none of the people that brought themselves to the work did anything from themselves in the work other than what God wanted done for the work.

Nobody playing jazz on that number. No improvising. It was just straightforward. He drew it. He wrote it. We made it. And notice, not only is that literary repetition in the whole chapter ten times over as the Lord had commanded Moses, but the literary inclusio of that last section sets it off.

Look at verse 32. Look at these words. Finished. Did. So they did. And then match that with verses 42 and 43. Done. Done.

So they had done it. I mean, that's what's holding the last section. It is completed. That's what the writer wants you to know, and that's what I'm trying to explain to you in Jesus.

You can't get any closer to God than faith in the work of Christ. You can't see anything, do anything, wear anything that's going to bring you into his presence other than what God has done.

[34 : 34] And then notice how it ends. Moses himself, the very last verse, blesses the people. I mean, this is actually reading like Genesis 1 and 2 to me now. Six days of creation, and after all it says what?

That God finished the work. He did it. It was all done, and when it was done, then he blessed them. And Jesus, you just said no, when he finishes his work, the very last words of Luke, he brings them out as far as Bethany, and he blesses them.

He completes his work, blesses his people, done, finished, complete, nothing more. Think of it now. Think of it. Because some of you are wondering, how do I get back to God?

Let me tell you, don't dress it up. Don't put on a show. Just go to Jesus.

He paid it all. You don't got to get pretty for me, you don't got to get pretty for the elders, you don't got to get pretty for this church. You don't got to hide anything.

[35 : 50] Just hear the Savior say, thy strength indeed is small, child of weakness, watch and pray, find in Christ thine all and all. Jesus paid it all.

Jesus paid it all. Jesus paid it all. He paid it all. Your way back into relationship with God is that simple, that fast, that clean.

Jesus, pay it all. I'm tired of putting on the big dress up. And I'm not looking for any to do it for me.

That was supposed to be a gentle invitation. My heart is gentle, even if my tone was not. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for these words and the corrective they are and the hope they give.

Thank you that we see in these garments what Jesus does without any need to be wearing them. Thank you that he completes it, finishes it, cried out indeed, it is finished.

[37 : 13] Help us then to run to him for dress. In his name we pray. Amen.