

Divine Priesthood

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[0:00] Through his word, he reveals himself to us and his will to us. We're going to turn to Exodus and chapter 29 this morning. So if you do have the Bible open, you'll see the headings going back in chapter 27 and picks up in 28 and 27.

You get the description of the altar and the courtyard and the lampstand, the oil for the lampstand. In 28, the transition happens from the tabernacle itself in the courtyard to the priesthood.

And so in chapter 28, you get the description of the priestly garments and then specifically the ephod and the breast piece. And we'll be talking about those a little bit and the other priestly garments, including the turban for the head and the sash and different things.

And then we're going to pick up reading at the beginning of chapter 29. And we'll read the first nine verses and then jump down. This is what you are to do to consecrate them.

Talking to Moses. This is what you are to do to consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.

Take a young bull and two rams without defect. And from wheat flour without yeast, make bread and cakes mixed with oil and wafers spread with oil.

[1:41] Put them in a basket and present them in it along with the bull and the two rams. Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water.

Take the garments and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself, and the breast piece. Fasten the ephod on him by its skillfully woven waistband.

Put the turban on his head and attach the sacred diadem to the turban. Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head.

Bring his sons and dress them in tunics and put headbands on them. Then tie sashes on Aaron and his sons. The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance.

This way you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. And then we'll just jump ahead and catch the end of the chapter starting at verse 44.

[2:51] So I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests.

So today in particular, we're kind of doing the transition from focusing on the tabernacle itself, including the courtyard and all the furnishings, to now focusing on the priesthood.

And God makes clear here that he's consecrating both. There's significance to the tent of meeting, to the tabernacle as a whole, and there's significance to the priesthood.

So we see them both together, and each of them gets multiple chapters here. Verse 45, then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. And that's kind of the overall message of the tabernacle.

God is desiring to tabernacle among his people, to dwell among his people. Verse 46, they will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt, so that I might dwell among them.

[3:57] I, the Lord, I am the Lord their God. The word of the Lord. So I had mentioned the outset of the service that Renee and I were gone last weekend down to Illinois for our daughter's wedding, and it was a wonderful time.

And as you can imagine, it was also fairly busy. But I did find time to do one of the things that I always love to do when I find myself somewhere new, and that's to tour around a little bit.

So one of the places we had family staying was an Airbnb, actually, right on the edge of Wheaton College's campus. And I know Claire and the Schober family know that territory well, and some of you, others of you maybe do as well.

But it had been years since I'd been in that area. But I had a few minutes, and I was able to wander around and wander onto campus, and I sort of watched a little bit of their football practice. I don't

know if you're really allowed to do that or not.

But I found the football stadium, and then I found the Billy Graham Center Museum, and then there's this castle up on a hill, and all very, very lovely, and it was neat to see, and it led to some neat conversations later in the weekend.

[5 : 17] But touring around is one of my favorite things to do, and that's really what I want to do here this morning as well, is just take you on a little bit of a tour. And instead of a football field, a museum, and a castle, we're going to go to a basin and a river and a fountain.

So first, the basin. So we've gone back in time. Oh, I forgot to put our tabernacle out today, but you've got a picture here of the basin and our tabernacle that the kids helped me build, and I so appreciate that.

It's been really good, helpful to have even sitting in my study as I prepare sermons. So we're there. Imagine that we're there now in the courtyard of this tabernacle in the Sinai wilderness.

Here's what God had to say about the basin. Make a bronze basin with its bronze stand for washing. Place it in between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it.

So this basin, like the Lego version, too, it didn't take as long to build as like the Ark of the Covenant or the lampstand with all the different parts and pieces.

[6 : 33] It wasn't as ornate, as significant as the Ark. It wasn't as beautiful as that golden lampstand and everything we talked about with that.

But it was important, this basin. The priests, they used it every day before starting their work. It was holy work. They had to be clean. So it was used every day, but it got special use on one particular day, ordination day.

And that's what we're going to focus on here this morning. So imagine you're watching, and there's this older man there and his four grown sons, and they've got their shirts off.

And it's go time. God had told Moses, verse 4, bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them, wash them with water.

So it's this really big moment. It's both ordination day and really it's the inception, the beginning of the priesthood there in Israel. They didn't really have priests before this.

[7 : 35] The tabernacle had been built and the furnishings, and that was all ready to go. And now it's time to get the priesthood going. That's what's happening here. And it all starts with water.

So Aaron was a special guy, Moses' brother, specially called by God, used of God. His sons were special guys, the nephews of Moses, specially called by God.

But they were far from perfect. Aaron, we know, he helped facilitate the whole golden calf fiasco. Two of Aaron's sons would later die an early death after playing fast and loose with the holiness of God.

So these were sinful people. They were special, but they were still very, very much sinners. And so they needed cleansing.

So the first stop was the basin. And the ceremony begins, and these candidates for ministry are stripped to the waist, and they're getting a once-over with water from this special basin.

[8 : 40] And the idea wasn't to try and get every last speck of dirt off. They had probably already washed up at home. This was a ritual, a ritual washing.

It symbolized spiritual purification. These sinners, they couldn't just go willy-nilly into the presence of God. Something needed to happen first.

Something needed to be done first. They had to be washed. And so for this ordination ceremony, this ritual, that was the first thing. After that, it was time to get them dressed.

So they're still standing there by the basin. They're washed up. And then Aaron and his sons are dressed up. They get dressed. Moses and others, they dress them up for the part.

They dress them appropriately for their role as priests. And there's a technical word for this part of the ceremony. It's called investiture.

[9 : 37] It's when you bestow or put on the sacred vestments to the newly ordained. You're clothing them in sacred vestments. And in verse 5, specifically talking about Aaron, it says, Take the garments and dress Aaron to be high priest with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself, and the breastpiece.

Fasten the ephod on him with its skillfully woven waistband and put the turban on his head. And really, it's hard to convey just the great significance of the clothing that the priests wore, in particular the high priest.

You've got a whole chapter, chapter 28, just about the priest's clothing. And it tells about all these things. And we'll just go through quickly. But I didn't put it on the slide.

But it even talks about the underwear. And then it gets into the tunic. It gets this long shirt with sleeves. And then over that is the robe. It's kind of, you think of it as a fancy poncho.

You know, one piece of fabric with a hole for the head. You put over, the priest would put over, made from blue cloth. And then the ephod is kind of a long vest.

[10 : 52] A long vest. It was woven with gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. Would have been very involved to make that.

And then the main thing about the ephod was that it was used to hold these stones in place, these stones on the shoulders. There were 12 stones. And on these stones were inscribed the names of the tribes.

So the names of the people were on this. And so the high priest, when he lifted that ephod up and put it on, he was putting on the people on his shoulders.

And this ephod, this fancy ephod sort of held them there. And so he was in that way kind of carrying them in with him into the presence of God.

The next is the breast piece, that dynamic piece over the heart. And I'll just read what the Bible says. It's described in Exodus 28.

[11 : 52] Make it like the ephod of gold, again, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, finely twisted linen. It is to be square, a span long and a span wide, which would be about nine by nine square.

Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row, there shall be a ruby, a topaz, and a barrel. In the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald.

In the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst. In the fourth row, a chrysalid, an onyx, and a jasper. That's a lot. All right next to each other. And it says, mount them in gold filigree settings.

There are to be 12 stones. And then it says, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the 12 tribes.

So it's really elaborate. We talked at the beginning of the service how God referred to his people as his treasured possession. And here we have that pictured very vividly.

[12 : 51] We have these precious stones that the high priest wore right over his heart with the names of his people engraved on there. You got all these precious stones representing God's people worn over the high priest's heart.

They were to stay close to his heart. And then you have the turbans, the head covering, and probably the significant thing there is the gold band on it that said, holy to the Lord, the high priest. He was set apart, set apart to represent the people to the Lord, to kind of bring them in to the holy of holies, into the presence of the Lord, holy work, holy unto the Lord.

And then kind of the fancy belt, the sash, kind of holding it all together. And really, all told, it was quite the outfit. It was quite something to look at.

All that color in a world that didn't really have much color. And all those gemstones and all the gold, the flowing robe, and the turban, and the whole outfit, it was quite something. And really, if you look at it close, you notice that it was meant to be kind of an extension of the tabernacle itself.

[14 : 01] The description of the creating of the tabernacle curtains is much, it's pretty similar to the description of the making of the clothing for the high priest.

They were very similar, all trimmed with gold. And the message was clear. Just as the tabernacle was meant to be a little bit of heaven on earth, so the priesthood, too, was meant to be a little bit of heaven on earth, represent heaven on earth.

And just as God was present in a special way there at the tabernacle, God was present in a special way also through the priesthood. Those priests, they represented the people to God, and God to the people.

That was their purpose, a holy priesthood. And that's why they were washed the way they were, dressed all fancy.

It's also why they were anointed. And that's the next thing. In verse 7, it says, Take the anointing oil, Moses, and anoint him, anoint Aaron, by pouring it on his head.

[15 : 06] In this way you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. Again, the priesthood is being initiated and instituted here. And that anointing was kind of the climax of the ceremony, of this ordination service.

Moses would take the oil and kind of pour it on them, and they'd run down their faces and drip off their beards. Oil representing the Holy Spirit.

It represented God coming on them and covering them and filling them in a special way. And they walked away, drenched with the Holy Spirit of God.

Mere human beings now equipped to do some holy work. So all told, that's what happened there at the basin. Ordinary human beings were washed and clothed and anointed, set apart for a holy calling.

Ordinary human beings were made to represent heaven on earth. Ordinary humans became this connection point between God and people, between people and God. In just a moment, I'm going to tell you that our God does the same sort of thing with us.

[16:21] And he does. But I can't go there just yet. The Old Testament priesthood doesn't just sort of morph into the priesthood of the New Testament or the priesthood of today.

No, it's all connected, but it's connected through Christ. So that's where we need to go next.

Colossians 1, verse 17 says, He is, Christ is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

The whole Old Testament priesthood really, it points ahead to a single person. And in Matthew chapter 3, we find that person down in a river.

So this river, it's the second stop in our little tour this morning. So we go from that ancient basin to another source of water, the Jordan River.

So listen to this from Matthew 3. Here's how it happened. Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptized by you.

[17:25] But do you come to me? Jesus replied, Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this. Why? To fulfill all righteousness.

Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting out.

So this here, it's like Jesus being ordained. It's like what happened with Aaron and the priests at the basin, there in the tabernacle.

And now, in a greater way, it's happening with Jesus. We read about it earlier in our catechism, that Christ has been ordained by God the Father, and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit.

He has been anointed to be our chief prophet and teacher, our only high priest and our eternal king. Aaron was washed and anointed.

[18:27] Jesus here is washed and anointed. Aaron was ordained to be Israel's high priest. Jesus here is ordained and acknowledged as the world's great high priest, the high priest of the world, cosmos, always and forever.

What happened there at the Jordan River, it was meant to tell us in no uncertain terms that Jesus is now our high priest. We've talked about how he's light for us, right, with the golden lampstand. We talked about how Jesus is the bread for us, the bread of life for us, connection with the table and the bread of the presence. He's that curtain torn in two, opening the way for us in to the Holy of Holies.

And now we learn, too, that he is our great high priest. He's the one who makes us his treasured possession, who puts on that breast piece and carries us close to his heart.

He's the one who puts that ephod on and carries us on his shoulders into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God. The book of Hebrews, pretty much the whole book of Hebrews is all about this, right?

[19:40] And it testifies to this, who Jesus is as our great high priest. I'll just give you an example from Hebrews 7. Now, there have been many of those priests, and it's talking about Aaron's descendants down through the years who tried to fulfill that role, and some did better than others, and they all died, right?

Since death can prevent them from continuing in office, but because Jesus lives forever, Easter, resurrection, hallelujah, he has a permanent priesthood.

Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them. So John the Baptist, he didn't want to baptize Jesus.

It didn't seem right for him to be baptizing Jesus, but Jesus insisted, and he insisted that he be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness, to fulfill all righteousness.

He was already clean. He's already set apart. He was already filled with the Spirit. He was divine, but still the promises of the ages were just waiting to be fulfilled.

[20 : 48] And so Jesus got wet that day to fulfill all righteousness. When Aaron got wet in the tabernacle and got all dressed up and anointed there in the tabernacle in that ceremony, it all pointed ahead.

It was all so full of promise, and Jesus came as the fulfillment. The fulfillment. He was revealed by water and spirit as our true high priest.

The bottom line, the Old Testament priesthood and all that we've read about, and more besides, it finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And Jesus, he fills it in a way no human ever could, and he transforms the priesthood and he remakes it, but he doesn't put an end to it.

The Bible says he's serving right now as our great high priest, but he's not the only priest. He's the high priest, but he's also got little priests that he's brought in to work with him.

Jesus. He's got these little priests that he brings in to his work, and 1 Peter 2 testifies to this.

Actually, I just heard that the Bible study on Wednesday nights is going to be going through 1 Peter, and it's a great book.

[22 : 15] You should show up. But 1 Peter 2 is one of my favorite passages in the scriptures. It says, As you come to him, the living stone, the capital S stone, the great high priest, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him.

Precious? You also, like living stones, precious stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. Us too, little priests.

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

So there's the great high priest, and then there's this whole priesthood, this whole priesthood. In Christ, that's who we are, and that's one of the reasons that we have this basin up here.

Not all that different than the basin and the tabernacle courtyard. We call it a font, a baptismal font, and we keep it up here every week as a reminder for us, so we're reminded of who we are.

[23 : 21] It's a reminder of our identity and our calling and really our ordination, our baptism. It's like an ordination, like Aaron and his sons at that basin all those many years ago.

Our baptism is a marker for us that we belong to the people of God, this covenant community, this royal priesthood. It's like an ordination.

It's like a sign of belonging to this group of people that have been set apart and who have a particular calling and purpose. The truth is, Jesus could do it all himself.

The great high priest, no problem, he could do it all himself, but he chooses to operate differently than that, to bring us in to him, bring us close to him, close to his heart, and to bring us in close into his work as well.

He wants us, and he calls us into his holy priesthood. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Why?

[24 : 29] That you might declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light. And that's what we learn at the font, that we belong, that we've got ourselves a great high priest, and we've got each other.

We've got a priesthood, and we're a part of this. We've got a purpose. And it's more than like a brotherhood, or a sisterhood, or a bowling league.

A priesthood is something that means that we're tied in with our great high priest, and it means we're really tied into each other and brought into his work.

We've got work to do. And like Aaron and the rest of the priests in the Old Testament, it's holy work. It's holy work, and it's exciting, but at the same time, I've got to be honest with you.

This work, our work, as the priesthood of Jesus, it's often pretty mundane, too. And the priests, well, if you think about it, a lot of what they did was pretty mundane, right?

[25 : 44] They spent a lot of time trimming wicks, and filling the little bowls with oil, and making bread, and they did a lot of cleaning, and they butchered animals, and grilled meat, and, well, they had a really big tent that they had to take down and set up at different times.

These priests, they were used of God to bring a little bit of heaven to earth, and a pretty amazing thing, a holy calling, but a lot of what they did was just kind of everyday stuff.

Everyday stuff. And that's true for us, too. It's this high honor for us to be involved in this, to be in this priesthood, the priesthood of Jesus.

It's an amazing thing, but it doesn't always look all that special, or feel all that significant. A lot of the time, it just looks very mundane, and it feels like a lot of hard work.

And that brings us to our final two stops in our tour for this morning.

[26:57] So we're going to wrap up our tour with a short film this morning, and through this film, we're going to go two places. We're going to make a stop at a neighborhood in Detroit, and to an auto repair shop in New York.

And we're going to meet two priests. We're going to meet two people, ordinary people, who are a part of the priesthood of Jesus, and kind of doing what they can, representing Christ, representing the Lord in the places where He has planted them.

Reet and George are their names, just out there doing what priests do in their everyday lives. And to me, really, they're powerful examples of how we might live this out, live out this holy calling in our everyday life.

So let's take a look. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[28:41] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31:11] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[33:41] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[36:11] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.