

God's Priests for His People

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please turn your Bibles back to Leviticus 8. We're going to cover two chapters today, 8 and 9.

Well, you might know that my wife, Hannah, and I don't come from the same cultural backgrounds. I'm Indonesian. Hannah is Australian.

My parents don't speak English. They speak Javanese and Indonesian. Well, Hannah's parents only speak English. So you can imagine how it's like when the two families meet.

It's kind of exhausting. I have to mediate between them. I translate Javanese to English and then English to Javanese.

And sometimes I have to tell my parents when they want to ask something inappropriate, like, how old are you, which is a very important question in Asian cultures because that determines your position in the social structure.

[1 : 06] And I have to tell them, no, we don't say that. We don't ask that in this culture. Or sometimes I have to tell my in-laws, I don't think we have any expression for that in our culture.

I can be the mediator because I can speak both languages. I understand both cultures, well, largely anyway. And I'm a part of both families.

In a sense, I have both identities. We can see the same idea in these two chapters, chapter 8 and 9. After seven chapters of instructions concerning sacrifices that enable Israel to live with God, now comes the actual thing, for Israel to actually live with God, for God to dwell with Israel.

But the question remains, humans and God belong to two completely different orders of being. They have two different cultures, so to speak.

How can humans live with God? Well, they need a mediator, someone who has both identities, and that's a priest.

[2 : 29] So the process of dwelling together starts with the ordination of Israel's priests, Aaron and his sons, in chapter 8.

And this ordination process highlights Aaron taking up a new divinely appointed identity in addition to his humanly one. Now, the process of the ordination looks like this.

We won't cover everything because of time, but pay attention to the theme of new identity. It starts with Moses washing Aaron and his sons with water.

Now, in verse 6, this washing symbolizes purification, some sort of transition from one state of being to another, from common to holy, from impure to pure.

So Aaron and his sons begin their transition into their new identity, to be holy, to be consecrated.

And then Moses clothes Aaron with his priest uniform in verse 7 to 9.

[3 : 47] Now, these days, uniforms no longer have significant meanings, but most of us still know that uniforms display people's identity. So we know that these are police officers.

We know that these are lawyers. We know that these are soccer players from their uniforms. And this is even more so the case with the high priest.

Everything about the outfit of the high priest points to his identity, his new identity as a mediator who belongs to both worlds. So he wears a breast piece, which carries 12 stones engraved with the names of 12 tribes of Israel.

And the implication is that the high priest carries all of Israel with him as their representative when he meets with God in the tabernacle.

And then tucked in the breast piece are the Urim and Thummim. We're not sure what these things look like. We're not even sure how they use these things.

[5 : 04] But they seem to be God's way to show his will to the high priest in major decisions. So the high priest used those stones, the Urim and Thummim, to know what God has to say about major

decisions.

And the implication is that at this point, the high priest is no longer just a representative of the people. He now takes up a new identity as the representative of God as he carries God's wisdom close to his heart in the breast piece.

And then on top of his head is placed a turban and a golden plate, which is engraved with the words, Holy to the Lord.

Again, this marks the high priest's new identity. He has been declared holy by God himself, no longer common. This is also what is signified by the anointing in verse 10 to 12.

The anointing oil declares Aaron as holy to God, consecrated to him. And then after all that, they offer the sacrifices.

[6 : 25] Moses starts with the sin offering in verse 14 to 17. And then he offers the burnt offering in verse 18 to 21. Now these two sacrifices are to atone for the priest's sins.

The implication is that the priests are not perfect. They're not inherently holy. They're just declared holy by God. But they still are sinful.

They still do sinful things. So they are both sinful and holy. And then the last sacrifice is for ordination, which has important details.

In verse 22 to 29, Moses offers a sacrifice almost exactly like the fellowship offering in Leviticus 3, but with very important distinctions.

The blood of the sacrifice is not only splashed on the altar like a normal fellowship offering, but it's actually applied to the right ears, the thumbs of the right hands, and the big toes of the right feet of Aaron and his sons.

[7 : 44] Again, here, the ritual indicates new identity. The blood is put on the priests as if they were an altar to indicate consecration for God's service.

And also, usually, in the fellowship offering, the right thigh of the animal is given to the priest. But here, the right thigh is waved.

And then in verse 28, Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar. It symbolizes complete dedication to God. Even the portion that belongs to them is dedicated to God. It indicates self-sacrifice. His new identity as the high priest of God consumes Aaron's whole being, so to speak. And finally, the priests are now told to finish the ordination ritual by staying at the entrance of the tabernacle for seven days, in verse 31 to 36, which again represents newness, right?

As God created the world in seven days, the creation of the priesthood takes seven days. And on the eighth day, they begin their service as a new creation, as someone who has a new identity.

[9 : 16] Okay, now the creation of the mediator is complete. Can God finally dwell with Israel? Yes. Now comes chapter 9, the high point.

So Moses tells Aaron and all the people of Israel to gather again, and the purpose is clear in verse 4 to 6. The Lord will appear to you. Finally, God will appear to the Israelites.

God, the king, will come. And now that there are priests as mediators, they will be able to meet with him and dwell with him. And so the sacrifices begin.

Aaron offers sin offering and burnt offering for his own sins. And then he offers sin offering, burnt offering, grain offering, and fellowship offering on behalf of the people.

Why? Why? Well, remember, these sacrifices are given in chapters 1 to 7 to enable Israel to live with God, which is what's about to happen now.

[10 : 24] And so here comes the turning point, the long-awaited moment. In verse 23, Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting.

Moses and Aaron go into the tabernacle to meet with God as the people's representatives.

Remember, at this point, Aaron enters carrying the names of the 12 tribes of Israel on his chest.

At this point, the whole Israel, as it were, meet with God. And they survive. Not only that they survive, Aaron and Moses come out.

But when they came out, they blessed the people on behalf of God. And then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people to see.

Can you imagine that? In Exodus, the glory of the Lord is like a cloud of fire. Imagine a cloud of fire hovering on the tabernacle for everyone to see.

[11 : 38] And then from that cloud, in verse 24, fire comes out and consumes the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar.

It displays God's acceptance of the sacrifices, the priests, and the people. Now they know that God accepts them, that God dwells with them, and they survive.

So they shout with joy and fall face down in worship. Here in these two chapters, we see the importance of priests in life with God.

They're the ones who belong to both worlds, having both identities, and therefore, only through them can people actually meet with God and survive.

And priests enable this by doing the priestly pattern of drawing near to God in offering sacrifices and meeting with God in the tabernacle to talk with him, and then going out to bless the people and encourage them to keep God's law.

[12:55] Draw near. Go out. Draw near. Go out. A priestly pattern. Now, two points of application.

First, this text shows a culture that is very different to ours. It's so foreign, but we today need a priest too.

We can't just draw near to God by ourselves. It's impossible. We and God are very different in nature. We belong to different cultures.

We're very different in nature, in holiness, in purity, everything. Between us and him is this infinite distance.

This is why works-based religions don't work. No matter how high we jump, we cannot cover that infinite distance to approach God. Telling people to work harder in religion is like telling them to jump higher to reach the sun.

[14:09] It's impossible. It's a lie. It's a torture. We need a bridge, a priest, a mediator who lives in both worlds and who has both identities.

and that priest for us is Jesus. Jesus is our high priest and he is far more superior than the Old Testament high priests.

In Hebrews 7, it says that he doesn't need to offer sacrifices every single day for his own sins and then for the people's sins.

No. He entered the throne of God and stays there forever. Because he is God's son. In fact, he's not like the Old Testament high priest who are common human beings clothed with the holy by God.

No. He's the holy clothed with the common. He's not like the sinful high priest who are just declared pure. No.

[15:18] He is the sinless who is made sin. As we will sing later, because the sinless savior died, my sinful soul is counted free.

He's not a human given a divine role. He is God taking up humanity. And so, Jesus doesn't need to prepare sacrifices like Aaron to welcome the glory of the Lord.

No. In John 1, he is the glory of the Lord. Jesus is the most proper high priest because he's the only one who properly belongs to, who properly has both natures.

He is both man and God. I think we often take this for granted. We often miss the importance of Jesus' priestly role.

people. We celebrate Christmas to remember his birth, and then Good Friday to remember his death, and then Easter to celebrate his resurrection. Well, that's all good, but we must not forget that his ministry did not stop at his resurrection.

[16:37] resurrection. In fact, the Apostles' Creed that we just declared says, on the third day he rose again from the dead, that's the resurrection, and then he ascended to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father as a priest.

After resurrection comes the ascension, which we celebrated on Thursday, the ascension day, and he is being seated at the right hand of God as a priest.

You know what that means? We will explore this theme a bit more next week, but for now, let it give you some comfort. In Hebrews 7, as Andrew has shown us, because Jesus is alive, and he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

He is a priest forever next to God. We are saved, not just at conversion, and then we're left alone after conversion, trying to prove that we deserve salvation.

No, he is able to save completely, because he's up there mediating for us day and night. He is praying for us after conversion, and he is praying for us.

[18 : 10] If there's anyone in this world whose prayers I have confidence in, it would be Jesus. is he going to do it.

He is going to do it. He is going to do it. He is going to do it. When we mess up in life, Jesus says to the Father, Father, forgive Ricky. Look at the blood that I've spilled for him, my blood.

Let that give you comfort and confidence that Jesus is our great high priest. Christ. And the second application, and this is what I'd like all of us to remember as well, we cannot forget our role as priests.

The world needs priests too to bring them to God and to show God's love and mercy and grace to them. And we are priests for the world.

in fact, when the New Testament writers talk about the Christian life, they express it using the pattern of the priesthood. Have you noticed that?

[19 : 24] Here in this text, Aaron begins his ordination by being washed. In Romans 6, the Christians begin their new life, their new identity, by being baptized.

baptized. And then here in this text, Aaron continues with being clothed with a uniform that displays his new identity.

In Romans 13, Christians are told to put on Christ, clothe yourself with Christ as their new identity. Christ as a sacrifice. Here in this text, Aaron offers sacrifices that indicate his complete dedication to God. In Romans 12, Christians are to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice.

And even in Revelation 22, at the end of history, we will meet God face to face, and His name will be written on our foreheads.

[20 : 35] just like the priest. In fact, we can see the same pattern in our second reading in 1 Peter 2. When we come to Jesus, we become priests, so that we can do the priestly pattern of drawing near and offer sacrifices, and going out to declare His praise to others, like priests blessing the people and causing them to shout in joy.

The whole of Christian life, starting with conversion and baptism, until we get to the new creation, takes the pattern of the priesthood.

In a sense, when we put our faith in Christ, we are ordained into the priesthood of all believers. priests. Do you see yourselves as priests?

Because you should. If you have put your faith in Jesus, you have been ordained into the priesthood of all believers. And so, we have one task in life, to be God's priests, and that involves two things, just like priests, drawing near and going out.

Draw near to him in prayers. Pray for the world, pray for your family, pray for your friends. Enter the tabernacle to meet with God in prayers, and the tabernacle being Jesus.

[22 : 18] That's why we pray in Jesus' name. Draw near to him in Bible reading and worship and meditation and watch as God makes you holy, just like he declared the priests holy.

Draw near to God by going to church. It's your priestly task. And then second, go out. Go out to represent God to the world by telling them about Jesus and his goodness and his love and his grace.

Go out and put on Christ so that the world knows him through your life. These are our tasks.

Draw near, go out. Draw near, go out. The priestly pattern. But Ricky, we're not all evangelists and pastors.

Yes, but what if that's a good thing? What if God has given you different skills and different interests to equip you as priests for those who have similar skills and interests as yours?

[23 : 35] Andrew and I are probably not the best priests for them. You are. And so I'm going to challenge you to do your priestly responsibilities.

in your handout, you will find a small piece of paper that says friends to pray for. You can think about three people that you know and who are not Christian.

Write their names down and stick it on your fridge or on your coffee machine. And every time you see their names, take a minute or two to pray for them.

Draw near to God and pray for them. And when opportunities arise, take courage to go out and tell them about Jesus.

And you can have confidence when you go out because you know that Jesus, the great high priest, is praying for you. Please consider doing this. Let's close with an evening prayer from an Anglican prayer book.

[24 : 46] this prayer depicts the priestly pattern of drawing near and going out. Let's say this prayer together. Father of lights, receive the prayer and praise we offer you as our sacrifice.

Make us a light for all the world, delivered by your goodness from all the works of darkness.
Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.