

Holy Mediator, Holy Garments

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[0 : 0 0] I'm Daniel. I'm a student here. Why don't I pray? Lord God, thank you for your word that you speak to us.

Tonight, Lord, help us to understand it. Help me to speak clearly and speak faithfully so that you will be glorified. Amen. Okay, so I'll start with a bit of a cultural experience.

Some of you might know, a few years ago, I lived in Brisbane. I was working up there. And Brisbane, it's much more casual than here in Melbourne. And my church was very casual. We're pretty casual here at five o'clock.

But yeah, it was very casual up in Brisbane. Like, pretty similar to here, I guess. Some people didn't wear shoes. And then one Sunday, it was Easter.

It was Easter Sunday. I thought, you know, it's Easter. We're celebrating something really important. I should dress up a bit. Not too much. I don't want to scare them. I just put on a shirt, a normal business shirt.

[1 : 0 3] And I came to church. And suddenly, people were surprised. People asked me, oh, is there something special on after church? Are you going to a wedding? Like, as if I was dressed for a wedding.

Yeah. Yeah. The point is, clothes that we wear, and even the way we wear them, they communicate something really important, don't they?

Even if it's not intentional. Or sometimes it is intentional. And I think you all know this, too. You wouldn't wear what you wear at the beach to a wedding, probably.

Maybe. Maybe. I hope so. And you wouldn't wear the same thing that you'd wear at either of those if you went to the shops. Most schools or workplaces, they've got a uniform, or at least a badge if you're working somewhere, so that people know what to expect from you.

Or for another example, you might remember last year, where every morning almost, or it felt like it, Daniel Andrews would show up on the TV and tell us all about how things are going with corona.

[2 : 1 1] And he'd always have that same jacket, didn't he? That infamous North Face jacket. He'd have it every time. Do you have the picture? Unless, oh, it's a bit squashed.

There he is on the right, left. He'd have it every time, unless there was bad news. When there was bad news, Daniel Andrews came out in his suit and his shirt, and we knew what was going to happen before he even said it.

Yeah, so our clothing, it communicates something significant, whether it's intentional or not. Now, the clothing that we're looking at today, of course, it's very intentional. This was God's instructions for what the priest should wear in the tabernacle.

And, like always, it will point to something really important. It points to something really important about what the priest's role is. So before we get to the significance of the clothes, let's try to go through quickly and get an understanding of what the clothes were.

But we'll try to keep it simple, because it's, as you heard, it's a very detailed, long passage. So if you've got your outlines, they came in the little booklet. If you need one, you can probably put a hand up, and someone might get you one, or the person next to you.

[3 : 27] If you've got your outlines, we're at the first point. So the first point is a description of the garments. And so we see in verse 1 to 5, a really good introduction at the beginning to the whole chapter, but to these garments.

So they're garments for Aaron, and for his family, for his sons, and probably all the other priests that would come after them in Israel's history. And then the garments, they're summarized, which is really neat, in verse 4.

So if you see verse 4, you've got a breast piece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. There's also, there is a picture here that I found on Google.

We don't have photos, so this is the next best thing. And as we go through each piece, you can maybe try to find it on the picture, and see if you can identify and keep up with where we're up to.

So God's instructions, they start with the outermost garment, and they move each other. And we're going to follow the same pattern. So we start with the ephod.

[4 : 32] It's in verse 6 to 14. I don't know if anyone here knows what an ephod is, or if they use that word very often. It's not a common word, don't worry, even I didn't know what it was.

But we're lucky that we have some clues in the chapter. So we're told in verse 7, it has shoulder pieces. And then we're told in verse 8, there's a waistband. So it's something that hangs down, it hangs off the shoulders, and it must go at least past the waist.

So think of it maybe like an apron, or maybe like a dress, like without much for sleeves, like a nice summery dress. But it was on top of the robe. And we see in verse 8, it's very, very colorful.

It's made with gold, blue, purple scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. So it's very colorful, it's very ornate. And of course, unlike most aprons, or most dresses, there's these two large stones.

They're set in gold and mounted on the two shoulders. And they've got the names of the tribes of Israel, six on one side, six on the other. So it would be pretty heavy. It'd be pretty heavy.

[5 : 41] No, not those ones. Sorry, Peter. We'll get to those, don't worry. Yeah, you can keep the priest up if you like. Yeah, so there's these two large stones on the sides with the names of the tribes written on them.

And it would be very heavy, heavier than most aprons. The next thing we see is the breast piece. The breast piece, if you keep scanning through the Bible, it's described in 15 to 30.

It's the same colors and the same material as the ephod. So again, in 15, blue, gold, purple scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. Then the breast piece, it's attached to the front of the ephod.

There's four gold chains in the four corners, which is described from 22 to 28. So I like to think of it as a really fancy bib.

If you can imagine that, it's not really like a normal bib, though, is it? Because it doesn't catch bits of food. Instead, it's lined with these 12 precious stones, much like the ones on the shoulders.

[6 : 45] Again, they're set in gold. And again, there's 12 of them this time instead of two. But they represent the same thing, the 12 tribes. And in verse 30, we read that inside the breast piece, there's something called Urim and Thummim are kept.

Like the ephod, we don't really know what those are exactly. But if you look at the text, you can see in verse 30, it says they're used for making decisions. And of course, the breast piece is called the breast piece of decision.

So it's got something to do with that. And we'll talk about it a bit later. Then the next piece we'll keep going. Under the ephod is a robe. It's in 31 to 35.

And so the robe is, it's completely blue. And we see that there are these little bells and little pomegranates hanging off the bottom. In 33 and 34, all around the hem.

The bells, we're told, they're supposed to ring as he goes in or out, kind of to warn God that he's coming. Well, not that God needs a warning, but it's symbolic.

[7 : 52] The pomegranates, no one's really sure what they're for. But they look nice. It could be fruitfulness, people suggest, but we're not sure.

Underneath the robe, there's a linen tunic, which is described in 39. And then under that is the linen underwear, which is in 42 to 43. So that's five layers all together.

So you've got underwear, tunic, robe, ephod, and then the breast piece hanging on the front. And then, of course, there's a special turban on the head. You can't forget your headwear.

It's in 36 to 38. So have a look there. So you'll find that the turban is made of linen, and it's got a gold plate or a gold plaque on the front with that inscription, which reads, holy to the Lord.

So it feels like it's quite a lot, isn't it? It feels like it would get quite uncomfortable to wear that much. And remember, they're out in the wilderness in the Middle East, and they're going towards Israel, which is not much better in terms of how hot it would be.

[8 : 59] So luckily for all of them, only Aaron has to wear all of that. You'll see in verse 40 and in 43, Aaron's sons, they only have to wear tunics, sashes, caps, and, of course, the linen underwear.

They don't have to wear the ephod and the robe and all that. That's just for the high priest. So that's all the clothes. As we've gone through them, you might notice something. The same colors have come up a few times.

Gold and blue and purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen. They're on the ephod. They're used for the waistband as well and the breast piece and the little pomegranates that hang off the robe, and the robe is also blue.

Some of you might remember these colors from a couple weeks ago. You might remember that they're actually matching the curtains of the tabernacle. Same set of colors. If you didn't notice, then let me tell you, they match the curtains in the tabernacle.

But why should they match? Is it important? At first, I thought perhaps it could be for camouflage. No, I don't think that works, especially with those bells that are always ringing as he walks around.

[10 : 14] He couldn't really go unnoticed. No, instead, I think the priestly clothes are similar colors because they fulfill a similar role as the tent and its curtains.

The tabernacle is the place where God comes down to meet with his people. And the priest is the person who mediates that meeting. So remember, the tabernacle, it was filled with gold, and it represents God's holiness.

The priest clothes need to represent a kind of holiness, which is necessary to be able to be that mediator and do that role.

But of course, the priest is just a man. He's not holy. He can't wear the clothes that represent holiness directly onto his body. And so just like how, remember with the tabernacle, you had the nice curtains on the inside, and you had those animal skins on the outside.

As this extra layer of protection. The priestly clothes have many layers in the same way. And you have those linen and underwear, linen tunic and linen underwear underneath, almost creating a barrier between the priest and the robe.

[11 : 27] So I think that's a good summary of how they looked. Now, let's think more about why they're significant or what they mean for his role. Now, we're on to the second point on your outlines, if you're looking.

And there's two parts here. So we're first going to look at what is the priest's role. And secondly, there's a really important characteristic for that. Yeah, this is point two.

So his role, the priest's role is to be a mediator. He's to mediate that meeting between God and people. What is a mediator? Let's just quickly get on the same page.

Someone who goes between two parties, a kind of go-between person, helps them to communicate. So perhaps if two people are having an argument, he will help them to actually communicate in a reasonable way, without getting angry and punching each other.

Or for another example, if you want to talk to someone really important, like you want to phone the prime minister and have a chat, or maybe the boss of a company, you'll contact them.

[12 : 30] And the first person you'll get is probably some sort of secretary or some sort of receptionist. And they have that person's authority to communicate with you, to organize things on their behalf, and maybe to make that meeting happen.

Or maybe they'll just tell you what that person would have said. So they also operate as a mediator. Now in terms of people of Israel, the people of Israel, they're unholy.

So just like someone really important, more important than me, they can't go to God directly. The people need a mediator, and that is the priest. And this works in both directions.

The priest has to mediate to represent the people before God. And then he also has to represent God back to the people, and what God wants to say. And so in both cases, the priest's clothing will reveal this, and it will remind him and even the people about it.

First, we're going to look at how the priest's clothing points to representing the people. So if you remember the shoulders of the ephod, have a look back to verse 9 to 12.

[13 : 40] So let's look at the shoulders. Take two onyx stones, engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel in the order of their birth. Six names on one stone, the remaining six on the other.

Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings, and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel.

Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord. So, yeah, when Aaron goes in to do his priestly things, he carries in with him the twelve tribes, all the people.

He carries them on his shoulders, and he's supposed to remember that he's carrying them in. And we see the same thing with the breastplate. So, again, with the same twelve stones. Have a look at verse 21.

It's very clear. There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of the twelve tribes. So, it's all pretty fancy, isn't it?

[14 : 48] Like these really nice-looking rocks. And it would be heavy. Wouldn't it be heavy? Hanging off with gold. These twelve big rocks, they're hanging gold chains. He couldn't possibly forget about what he's carrying.

The weight of those rocks would be a constant reminder to him, and to all the people seeing them, that he is representing them before God. And verse 29 really summarizes it.

Whenever Aaron enters the holy place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord. So, the priest, he represents the people when he does his things, when he brings their sins to the sacrifice in the tabernacle to be dealt with.

He's bringing the sins of all of them to be dealt with. We're actually going to look at what the priest does later on. It's not in this chapter. Spoilers. Whatever it is, in all of it, in every part of it, they must remember they're doing it as the mediator and on behalf of the people.

And the clothes, especially these stones, they're going to help him to remember. And they're there to help all the people as well to remember. Now, in terms of the next one, God being represented back to the people, it's right there in the next verse.

[16:09] So, have a look at verse 30. Also put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord.

Thus, Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord. Yeah, so this is the Urim and Thummim again. And again, as it says, they're therefore making decisions somehow.

Now, so most people, they think they were probably two rocks. So, can we have them on the slide there? There they are. So, that's probably the Urim and the Thummim.

Something like perhaps a yes and a no rock or maybe that kind of thing. So, he would inquire of God. He would ask a question and he would pull one out. And he would see what God had said.

Yeah, so that's a picture of what they might have looked like. I don't know. This is a photo, but they didn't have photos back then. So, it's probably a recreation. And you can see that they're labeled as well.

[17:10] They've got text on them. And that way, you know which one is which. If you can read it. I can't read it. It's okay if you can't. It's in Hebrew. So, it's clear anyway, whether you can read them or not.

It's clear that they're for inquiring of God, getting direction from God, and then he can come back and direct the people. So, in the same way, these clothes, they help the priest to understand and to remember his role as mediator, that he's both representing the people to God, and he's bringing God's message back down to the people.

And as we said, this is necessary because people are unholy. The unholy people need a priest. And so, this is the second thing in point two.

The most important characteristic for a mediator in that role between people and God is that he must be holy. But then, isn't the priest just a man?

Isn't the priest also unholy? Ah, yeah, he is. The priest is also unholy, so he needs coverings or clothes. Not that the clothes make him holy in some magical way, but they're to represent this.

[18:26] The priest's garments point to his role as mediator by pointing to this necessary component of the job and kind of signifying it or making him holy in a symbolic way.

And so, we have that plaque on his hat, on his turban on the front. But it was in verse 36, Make a plate of pure gold, engrave on it as on a seal, holy to the Lord.

There to remind himself and everybody else. So, everyone would see, everyone would know how important it is for the one who goes in to mediate between the people and God that they must be holy.

Again, in a later passage, I think it's maybe next week, we'll see how the priests themselves are made holy, how they have rituals for that. But here we see the clothing itself representing holiness.

In a sense, it kind of covers up their unholiness. And so, again, it's similar to how the clothing is similar to the tabernacle, how it resembles the tabernacle.

[19 : 39] It's got all the colors and it's got all the layers. And so, when you've got the tabernacle with God on the inside, because even the tabernacle is holy, it's covered with animal skins.

So, with the ephod and the robe, they've got all the colors, they've got all the gold, they've got all the rocks. That's the kind of clothing that can appear in God's presence. But you need that extra layer underneath of the linen tunic, the linen underwear, to act as a covering for the priest's unholiness.

Have a look at verse 40. It talks about the tunics and it makes this point. Make tunics, sashes and caps for Aaron's sons to give them dignity and honor. Dignity and honor. To cover them up.

And so, just like the tabernacle points back to Genesis 3 with the animal coverings, God makes clothing for Adam and Eve and it covers their shame and gives them dignity.

This is exactly the same thing. And verse 43 tells us how important this is. Have a look at 43. It protects them from dying.

[20 : 54] Imagine you're at work, in your office or wherever you work, and because you weren't wearing the uniform correctly, there's a risk of just dying. It's pretty sobering.

I think it's important for them to be aware of this. If the priest goes in and his unholiness isn't covered, he's not going to be mediating any sacrifices.

He's just going to become a sacrifice. And it won't mediate for anyone. It'll just be on account of his own sin. This is a constant reminder.

Nobody can do this job unless they are holy. The priest's clothing are important to give this enabling or this symbol for the priest to be able to perform that role as mediator.

The priest need clothes to be holy or to be made holy, and the people need a mediator because they're unholy. Now, today things are pretty different, I suppose.

[21 : 57] We don't have a temple. We don't have a tabernacle. We don't have priests who dress like in the picture. Sometimes they wear robes, but not like that.

But in another way, things are very much the same, aren't they? We still need a mediator today between people and God because people today, we today, are still unholy.

In Paul's letter to Timothy, it's up there on the slide, 1 Timothy 2, he writes, there is one God, one mediator between God and mankind.

Is he talking about a high priest of some sort? No, of course not. He continues, the man Christ Jesus. But how can Jesus be our mediator if he wasn't wearing the priestly clothing?

Well, Jesus didn't need priestly clothes to make him fit for that job because Jesus was already holy. In fact, Jesus was the one person of all people who was most fit for that job because he's the only person who never sinned, the only person who was perfect, righteous, the Holy One of God.

[23 : 09] So he's able to fulfill that role. He's able to do it. But how does Jesus function as our mediator? So like the priest, he must be able to represent us, the people, to God and then to represent God back to us.

It's the same two things. And Paul continues in the next verse. I don't think it's on the slide. In 1 Timothy, he says, For there's one God, one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

Jesus Christ, he chiefly represents us in his death. In our passage, in verse 38, the one in Exodus, it says, The priest will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts from the Israelites.

He brings their sins in to the sacrifice. And in the same way, in the exact same way, Jesus bears our guilt. In his sacrificial death, he represents us.

He represents our sin and our shame as he bore God's wrath on our behalf. And now he still continues to represent us before God.

[24 : 20] He continues to be our mediator as our advocate. So John writes in 1 John, which is up there, in 1 John 2, If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

He's the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not only for ours, but also the sins of the whole world. So Jesus is always there. He's advocating for us. He's interceding on our behalf as our mediator.

Well, how does Jesus represent God to us, the other half of that job? Well, it's simple. And Jesus is God, isn't he? He's the word became flesh.

And we celebrate it every year at Christmas. We celebrate this miracle of the incarnation, that Jesus became a man. Or as Paul writes in Colossians, he's the image of the invisible God.

In the Gospels, you see Jesus' life, how he teaches, how he teaches with God's authority in particular. He heals with the same compassion and the same power that God has.

[25 : 25] He cares for the needy, as God does. And, of course, he sends the Holy Spirit to us, which is promised by God. In all of those things, Jesus represents God to us.

He is God. He represents us in his life, his ministry on earth, and in this witness that's written of him, this one, the Bible. It's God's word, witnessing to us of the way that Jesus represents God.

Jesus is our holy mediator. He's able to bridge that gap between us, unholy people, and our holy God. But just that alone, maybe it's not that special.

Weren't there so many priests? Weren't there plenty of priests who did a similar job? Well, Jesus is not just any old mediator. He's not just any old priest.

He's the mediator of a much better covenant. We're up to the third point. Oh, no. Yes. We're up to the third point on your outlines and the second one on that.

[26 : 30] So our other reading today was from Hebrews 8, and it compares Jesus to those priests, to those ordinary priests. So look at Hebrews 8. Look at verse 3 to 5.

We see the priests. Verse 3. See, every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices.

So it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle. See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

So these priests, they always make their ordinary sacrifices in an ordinary sanctuary, in the ordinary tabernacle. But about Jesus, we read in verse 1 and 2.

[27 : 27] Now the main point of what we're saying is this. We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle, set up by God, not by a mere human being.

So Jesus, our high priest, serves in the true heavenly sanctuary, not made by people. And in the same way that the tabernacle, the old one, was a shadow that points forwards to that heavenly picture of all people in God's presence and in God's dwelling place, the priest's role as well.

As a mediator, his clothes remind us about it. It's a shadow. It's a shadow that points to that heavenly high priest and ultimate mediator, Jesus Christ.

When he made his offering, he sat down. It was made once for all. He paid for all sin, for all time, once for all, even for the people all the way before him, the ones back in Exodus.

He sat down at God's right hand. So this covenant, it's way better than theirs. It's way better than that one in Exodus. That one was supposed to point to this one, to the new one.

[28 : 42] And that's what we see in verse 6. But in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

Jesus is our superior mediator because we have a superior covenant. The old one, it had these layers of protection. The people are unholy.

They need a priest. The priest is unholy. He needs clothes. The camp was unholy. So they've got a tent. The tent, that was too holy. So it's covered up. All of these layers. Our new covenant is greater because we don't need that protection anymore.

Now, when Jesus was up on the cross, he made his priestly sacrifice and he wasn't wearing the robes. He was naked. We don't require special robes or magic underwear to make us holy because we are made holy in God's sight by the one-time sacrifice of Jesus.

While they could only access God through the mediation of a priest with his ephod and his urim and thummim, we are able to pray directly to God as Jesus advocates and he intercedes for us.

[29 : 59] The priestly garments, they've got all the colors, all the rocks, and they all serve to remind the people of the need for a mediator between them and the holy God. And so for us too, they ought to remind us of the much greater mediator that we have and the much greater covenant.

I think many people, they get distracted by things like clothes. I think for many people, the experience of church, or maybe what they expect, is robes and rituals and rocks, maybe.

Maybe for you, it was the same at one stage. We don't really look like that here in Doncaster, I guess. 5 p.m. especially is pretty casual. And perhaps you enjoy that sort of thing, all of the ritual, all of the history.

But it's not the important thing at all. We just don't need it. And sometimes it's a distraction. Some of you might be quite new to church or to Christian things.

I'm glad you're here. And maybe that sense of history or ritual has brought you here to church. But what we've seen tonight is that what's more important is what that stuff pointed to.

[31 : 15] The one who can mediate between us and God. Because if you're honest with yourself, you know that you probably need a mediator. You know that you're not perfect.

You're not holy. Sometimes you're not even good. I'm not judging you. I'm exactly the same. We, you, need a mediator.

And if you hear this and realize it, then what we've read tonight is good news. You have a mediator in Jesus Christ. All you need to do is pray. All you need to do is ask God.

Recognize your failure at being holy or good, which is your sin. Ask for forgiveness. A humble prayer of repentance is a prayer that God will always answer. And after that, it doesn't stop being true, does it?

Even if you've been a Christian for 50 years, you still need a mediator. You still need that mediator, Jesus Christ. I know sometimes it's hard for you to remember that, or for me.

[32 : 22] It happens to all of us. And if it hasn't, it probably will. You'll go through times where you aren't really caring about God. Maybe you aren't really praying. You're distracted or something worse.

You'll be struggling with sin, struggling with addiction. All of the guilt and the shame builds up. In that time, the temptation is to feel that you can't come before God, that you're not good enough.

You just want to stay all mopey and guilty and ignore it. Well, of course, partly guilt, it comes from your conscience. It reveals your sin to you and reminds you of what you should do.

But often it's not that. There's another temptation. There's this accusing voice that tells you, you're too awful. Do you think you can approach God in that state and ask for forgiveness?

Perhaps you know this experience well. And technically, it's sort of true. You can't. You can't approach God on your own. That's precisely why you need a mediator.

[33 : 29] So praise God. By his grace, you have one in Jesus. You should remember that, especially in those times. But it's hard, isn't it?

I know it's hard. What do you do? Do you give up? No. Find people to help you remember. If they're struggling to remember, remind them.

Care for one another. Ask how people are going as they follow Christ, as we follow Christ together. Tell each other that we can come before God anytime, even now.

And one day, we will be right there in his presence. This is what we look forward to as Christians. This is where our hope is. Remind one another. One day, we'll be in his presence, covered, clothed, even, with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

That makes us, just like that plate says, holy to the Lord. So I'm going to ask God now to help us remember.

[34 : 30] Join me. Our Lord God, thank you that you do not leave us alone, even as you are holy and we are not. Our Lord God, thank you that you cared for us so much, that you wanted to come down to meet us.

And Lord, thank you that you've given us the Holy One to be our mediator. Jesus Christ, in his death, in his life, and his sacrifice. That Lord, through him, we can come before you.

We can be forgiven. We can have new life and look forward to the new creation. Our Lord, help us to remember this. Lord, help us to help one another to remember this.

Our Lord, help us to help one another to continue to look to you, to look to Christ, to follow you and find our hope in you. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.