

Our Great High Priest

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[0 : 00] seated. Well, good morning. Again, it is warm. I see the fans and the bulletins flapping.

Just so you can know, there are fan zones. If you are not in a fan zone and you are feeling like you are dying, go ahead and get up now and move to a fan zone so that you can feel the breeze and stay awake and stay alert for the next few minutes. If you need to get up and take a glass of water or the water fountain out by the bathroom in the back, please feel free to do that in the middle of my sermon. I promise I won't be offended. And please know that as well, there's downstairs, I think, is still a little cooler. Alex, is that right? Yes? A little bit. Not a lot, but a little bit. So if you just need a different space to get up, you may go downstairs and there's speakers down there and you'll be able to hear the sermon well from there. So in the next little while, we want you to be as comfortable as possible so that you can listen to God's Word. Because this is, as we gather, the central thing in many ways about what we do is to listen to what God has to say to us. So let me encourage you to take those steps as we get started this morning.

We are in a series in the book of Exodus. And if you would like to turn there, you may turn there with me. Page 68 is in the Pew Bibles. As you're turning there, I want to ask you a question. If you could walk into God's throne room, what would be your default understanding of God? We often, I think, fall into one of two camps. And for those kids in the room, I'm going to teach you two really big words right now. The first one, the first camp is that we focus on God's transcendence. What does transcendence mean? My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty. It means that God is high and exalted and beyond us in His greatness and in His glory. He's untouchable and unreachable. That's transcendence. And often I think we focus on this, His majesty and His power, His sovereignty and His creator role that is other than the creation in which we live. His holiness, His moral purity and His judgment make a transcendent God unapproachable and terrifying. But some of us perhaps think of God by focusing on His imminence. Imminence means that He is close by or approachable or near to us.

[3 : 15] We focus on the fact that God has made Himself known, that God is with us. You know the old Bible song, Jesus is a friend, is a friend next to you. Jesus is a friend, is a friend. La la. Nope.

Okay. I just dated myself, didn't I? So if you haven't heard that one, you need to sign up for a vacation Bible school or go off to Christian camp somewhere so you can pick it up. This sense that Jesus, that God is familiar to us, that He is close to us, that He is a friend and that in doing so, and that God in His mercy and grace is approachable and accepting.

And I think the reality is that most of us have a default of one or the other. If I looked at our broad church culture, generally I think we lean towards the second.

God is very familiar and approachable to us, and we lack a valuing of His holiness. But for each of us, because of your own story, because of your own background, both in church and in your own family, you may be on either side of this spectrum.

But I want you to think about it because as you consider this, our default view of how God is then affects how we think we can or cannot approach Him, and how we worship Him, and how we serve Him.

[4 : 40] And we tend towards one or the other, and yet what we see in the Bible and what we have seen already in the book of Exodus is that the Bible affirms both. God is both a transcendent, high, exalted, holy God, and a God who has come down to be with His people, to be known, and to know, and to be amongst them.

We've seen it. His transcendence is shown in things like His power in the ten plagues when He judged Egypt and showed His great judgment against sin and His great power over the created order.

How He traveled with His people in a pillar of smoke and fire that was terrifying and unapproachable. How when Moses went up to the top of the mountain, the glory descended, and it was like lightning and thunder and a storm beyond, and the people shrank back in fear and said, we can't go up there. Moses, you go for us.

Moses. And yet, this same story of Exodus has also had God meeting with Moses at the burning bush. We've seen God meeting with Moses on the mountain face to face.

And we've seen back in chapter 19 the incredible promise that God will take this people and having delivered them from Egypt, make them His people. And He will be their God and He will dwell in their midst.

[6 : 12] This high and exalted, transcendent God will actually live among the people of God. And as we've been just recently talking about, if you were here last week, in chapters 25 through 31, we have the picture of the tabernacle, which is this portable worship center, basically, for God's people to worship Him.

And the very picture that Nick painted of this is that this tabernacle had the amazing good news that God would actually, His glory would come and dwell in the midst of His people.

And yet, that dwelling had curtains and layers and all these barriers because a holy God cannot be casually addressed, cannot be casually walked up into.

Why is this? Try to make it through. Because God is a holy God. The Bible describes Him as being an unapproachable light or having a purity that is white as snow, having the purity of a clean water. And when in our sinfulness, in our imperfection, both morally and personally, we try to interact with this purity, all we do is besmirch such holiness.

[7 : 43] We soil His purity. We ruin His perfection. And so, sin is this defilement of a holy God.

It is incompatible with God. And it results in judgment. Like approaching a fire too closely, you get burned.

So, in our sinfulness, as we approach the fire of God's holiness, we find that judgment is the appropriate response for our imperfection.

And so, this then leaves us with a great dilemma, doesn't it? And this is what God is answering in this section on the tabernacle and indeed in this greater story in Exodus of God calling His people to be His people is how is it that God, the Holy Transcendent One, can have communion or fellowship or be with a sinful people like us?

How is it possible that we could approach God and that He could dwell in our midst? And this brings us to our text this morning. Chapters 28 and 29.

[8 : 54] Again, Nick mentioned last... or Nick preached last week on the tabernacle, the building in which all of this happened. But what we see is that in the midst of the building, God has provided something else for us to understand.

No, I'm good, thanks. God has given us something else so that we can understand how it is that His people may interact with Him, a holy God, and that is the priesthood.

God has provided one to stand in the gap between a holy God and sinful people to be a priesthood for us. So we're going to look at the nature of the priesthood today.

We're going to look at what these two chapters tell us about it and we're going to think about what it means for us. So if you want to follow along with me, I'm going to read three sections. I'm not going to read the whole two chapters.

I promise, good heavens, we'd be here till noon. We're going to read two sections, the beginning of chapter 28, the beginning of chapter 29, and the very end of chapter 29, just so you can get the shape of what it is.

[10 : 01] Broadly, chapter 28 is about the garments that the priest would wear and chapter 29 is about the process of the consecration or the setting apart of Aaron and his sons to actually be the priesthood.

So broadly, that's what these two chapters are about. Let me read and then we'll pray and then we'll dive in and see what this has to teach us. So Exodus 28, chapter 1.

Then bring near to you Aaron, your brother, and his sons with him from among the people of Israel to serve me as priests, Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

And you shall make holy garments for Aaron, your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful whom I have filled with a spirit of skill that they make Aaron's garment to consecrate him for my priesthood.

These are the garments that they shall make, a breast piece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron, your brother, and his sons to serve me as priests.

[11:19] They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twisted linen. And flip with me to the beginning of chapter 29 and the consecration.

Now this is what you shall do to them, to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, an unleavened bread, unleavened cake mixed with oil and unleavened wafers smeared with oil.

You shall make them of fine wheat flour. You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket and you shall bring the bull and the two rams. You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.

Then you shall take the garments and put on Aaron the coat and the robe and the ephod and the ephod and the breast piece and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod.

And you shall set the turban on his head and you put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them.

[12:37] And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. And then flip to me to the very end.

God restates his purpose in doing all this. Starting in verse 44 of chapter 29. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar.

Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God and they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them.

I am the Lord their God. Please pray with me. Lord as we look into your word this morning we pray you help us on this hot day to listen well to your word and to learn of you.

Lord I pray for your help. Lord that your word might be clear and that together we might marvel in the greatness of not only your holiness but also of the grace that you have shown giving us means that we might have fellowship with you.

[13:55] We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. What do we learn?

As we're looking at this I just want to point out to you that in the bulletin if you haven't looked through it yet there is this lovely picture for those of you who have reading glasses I'm sorry the type is really small it's what we could get so I apologize for that not being as useful but what this does is it gives you a picture of everything that's talked about in chapter 28 and I just want to point it out now because I'm not going to be reading through the sections but I'm going to be referring to verses and aspects of the priestly garments as part of what I want to do is look at the nature of the priesthood both in terms of its garments and in terms of its their consecration so that we can learn a little bit about what it means for these priests to play a mediating role between a holy God and a sinful man how is it that they take up this role and how is it that they are a blessing to God's people so let's look at that there are four things

I want to point out this morning about the priesthood the first thing I want you to see and you see this in verses 1 through 4 of chapter 28 is that the priesthood was God's plan remember Moses has gone back up onto the mountain and God is now giving him further instruction on how they are to live as God's people and he's instructed them on this building they're supposed to make this movable tent and then in verse 28 he just launches into it remember that the priesthood is not man's idea it was not Moses thinking hey I think there's a problem here God and I've got a solution God was the one who set aside Aaron and his sons and here's a remarkable thing Moses after the tabernacle was put together and consecrated Moses couldn't go in that wasn't his place anymore Moses was actually he had a different role to meet with God at the tent of meeting but he couldn't go in to the holy of holies his job was not as a priest in the same way it's a fascinating recognition that when God ordained this he actually brought

Aaron in and his tribe to take this place and to play this role and what you see look at verse 41 of chapter 28 nope yep verse 41 of chapter 28 and you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them anoint them means that they are marked with God but with oil and for a special role to ordain them is to commission them to a particular place of service and to consecrate them is to set them apart these priests now have a role that is distinct from all the other peoples within God's within God's people they have now a

special a special role that God has called them to to be fully devoted to this service of the Lord and to serve in the temple and it's a remarkable thing that God has said now I want this chunk of you to be set apart for just this and nothing else and we see that as it plays out the Levites don't have a land because they serve in the temple and they have cities and they're provided for by the other tribes and there are all sorts of ways in which

God has allowed them and set them apart to have a focus on this one role and then on top of that look at 28 verse 36 for a minute as God is instructing them of the turban there is a crown there and that crown has emblazoned on it holy to the Lord is that what it says in the ESV holy to the Lord which means that the priest himself is being set apart again holiness really means set apart it has a moral component because God in his moral perfection is set apart from us but it's a broader concept to simply be set apart for God and the priest the high priest here Aaron is set apart and when he puts that thing on he is set apart for God to play this role and to do nothing else but to play that role friends what good news it is that God has ordained this role and this thing that he has created this priesthood that he has graciously seen the problem that we have of a sinful people approaching a holy God and he has set apart people to play a role of mediation between us we should know that we cannot approach God casually or on our own we ought to be reinforced in our understanding that we may not choose God simply on our own but that God calls and God invites and God draws and God makes us his people and what good news that is not only is the priesthood then set apart by God but the priesthood is characterized by beauty and glory you see this in chapter 28 verse 2 which I read earlier and again in chapter 28 verse 40 you shall make them for glory and for beauty now when we unpack this we see all sorts of things the colors purple gold blue are the colors of the tabernacle these are colors of royalty and colors of richness and both the tabernacle and the priestly garments are meant to reflect the richness and the beauty of God himself precious metals are used over and over again in the making of this garment for them gold in particular is throughout precious stones are put on the breastplate we see that God uses

[20 : 34] God takes the most precious things that the Israelites have to clothe the priest to clothe the one who will be this representative because it is fitting for one who approaches a holy God to have clothing that reflects his beauty and his glory and his majesty and interestingly too even something as mundane as the undergarments okay I don't know if you picked this we didn't read this so in verses 42 and following of chapter 28 it talks about the undergarments of the priest which is a little awkward but here's here's the amazing thing about it in all of the nations around in Canaanite ritual one of the major ways in which gods were worshipped in the cultures had to do with sex there was temple prostitution you would go in those who served in the temple would be available so that the worshipper could come and by having sex with them would actually then claim some sort of right or at least make a case for God to respond to them in a particular way and friends it's so far from what we do here at church that it's it's sort of unthinkable but recognize how radical it was because the God of the Bible says no that is not what that is for and that is not what it means to worship me and so I will clothe my priest with undergarments so that it is clear to all that this is not a part of worshipping me you worship me in spirit and truth you worship me through the offering of sacrifices and the washing of your hands you worship me through the lighting of candle because all of these have images of light and truth and purity that reflect who I am but not that now in the old days the church used to get dressed up for church used to wear a coat and tie some of you still do praise the Lord because there's a right recognition that in that culture there was a sense of

I want to bring my best to church and there's a good heart behind that but on the other hand what we do see is that it's easy for us to just as in the old testament to get caught up in externalism and to think if I look good on the outside isn't that great and what God really wants is for us to clothe ourselves in beauty and glory not with our external merely thankfully we have great freedom in this church and may it go on forever you can wear what you have to come to church but what God really wants is for us to worship Him in the splendor of holiness Psalm 96 says this ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name bring an offering and come into His courts worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness tremble before Him all the earth say among the nations the Lord reigns worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness is not His holiness it's ours we are to bring the splendor of who He is and what He's done in us and for us to bear and we are to bring a goodness a character an internal reality that our life is set apart for God and that is a beautiful

God that we serve so God has ordained the priests and God has made them beautiful and full of glory to reflect Him and to rightly approach Him the third thing we see is that the priest represents

the people and turn with me to chapter 28 verse 9 in the middle of the ephod which is this tunic or piece of clothing that they wear there are clasps on the top and on those clasps there are onyx stones onyx is a black gemstone and on those stones then are written in filigree of gold the names of the tribes of the people of Israel and then on top of that is put the breast piece which some translations have breast plate which makes it feel like a medieval set of armor it's not that it's a piece of cloth but on that piece of cloth it has stones twelve of them in fact and on each stone is written again the names of the twelve tribes of Israel because the priest stands as he goes in and serves in the tabernacle because he represents the people of God he stands for the people of God just as Moses did in some way on the mountain as Moses went up and the people said no, no, no we don't want to go you go for us so God graciously accommodates and recognizes this and says okay

I'm going to there is a priesthood that I have ordained to represent you before me and they wear these clothes so that they might do it and friends this is good news that one might stand for us we often think in our individualism and maybe in our pride and self-confidence that we can approach God on our own and be okay but I hope that as we've reflected a little bit on God's holiness this morning we realize it's a fearsome thing and that there is a place where it is a valuable thing to have someone mediate or someone stand between us and those who rule over us and judge us though God is a good God it does remind me of there's this great story that I read called The Miracle on the River Kwai about a guy named Ernest Gordon who was a prisoner in Southeast Asia in World War II and how he saw God at work in the midst of the most dismal abominable and cruel circumstances and one of the things that happened in those in those camps is that the officers would often stand in the place of their men when a man would find himself on the wrong side of a guard's attention where he'd done something wrong or maybe he hadn't done anything wrong and the guard had started to just abuse him which was common in this place the officers often would step in and stand in the place of their soldiers to mediate and sometimes that just simply relieved the pressure and the punishment did not happen and sometimes the punishment was turned on the officer friends those soldiers were glad to have one stand in their place now our God is not a cruel taskmaster but he is a holy God and for us to have one to stand in our place and to bear our names is a beautiful thing so finally

God ordains them God dresses them in beauty and glory God calls them to bear the role of a representative and finally we see that this priesthood must be without sin this is what chapter 29 in some ways is all about as Aaron and his sons are set apart there is a recognition that they may not approach a holy God on their own righteousness either that they too are sinful that they too must have sacrifices shed for them in verses 10 through 25 of chapter 29 it's about three sacrifices a bull for a sin offering to atone for their sin the first ram offered as a burnt offering to express their devotion to God and then the third one a wave offering or a food offering to express their communion with God having had the covering of the first two sacrifices already and when you look throughout you see the blood of these sacrifices is sprinkled everywhere it's on the altars it's on the clothing of the priests it's on the priests themselves their ear and their nose and their toe signifying everything that they do these priests needed a sacrifice to cover their sin as well so that they might not die and you see this actually mentioned twice in verse 28 or in chapter 28 verse 35 you see this made clear right they're wearing these bells and the hem of their robe is a particular thing when he comes out so that the very end of the verse is so that he does not die and then again on verse 43 and then when

[30 : 22] Aaron and his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place lest they bear guilt and die so built into this whole picture there's a recognition that it is a fearsome thing to approach a holy God and as we'll see in just a few more chapters as Aaron and the people rebel against God with the incident of the holy calf God breaks out against them and he even says I can't go with you anymore because my holiness is so hot and your sinfulness is so great I will merely destroy you this is the assumption that God is so holy and yet what we see here is that even these priests who are ordained and called by God to represent the people and to stand between sinful people and a holy God as they do their office they too must offer up sacrifices so what do we see we see that the tension of how a sinful people may approach a holy

God is relieved God has provided a mediator God has provided someone to serve in the temple and to play this role so that we don't have to be afraid as the people of God and as the people of

Israel of old and yet the tension is also ratcheted up because we see that even the priest that was provided wasn't enough it wasn't perfect enough it didn't actually resolve the tension because they were men just like we they were human beings in our sinful condition just like we are and it is awesomely good that God would choose them to play this role but it is awesomely terrifying because God cannot tolerate sin because only a sinless one could truly represent and bear the sins of another friends this is the good news is that this whole priestly system as much as it graciously provided a way for

God's people to interact with him and for a holy God to dwell in their midst it also pointed ahead it expressed an incompleteness a lack of total resolution of the problem and it pointed ahead and so the saints of the Old Testament looked ahead longing to see how God would do this how it is that the priesthood would be finally fulfilled how it is that their sins could finally be atoned for how it is that they could finally dwell with God and he with them in perfection and friends this leads us to the passage that was read earlier and I want to look at it again we're not going to spend a lot of time here but in Hebrews chapter 7 verses 23 through 27 let me just read this the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office but he that is Jesus holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever consequently he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them now listen to this because this should have echoes of everything we've just read for it is indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest holy innocent unstained separate 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 for the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests but the word of the oath which came later than the law appoints a son who has been made perfect forever friends do you see this God has chosen Jesus and anointed him and consecrated him and ordained him to be ultimately our high priest and he has clothed him with beauty and with glory that is unmatched that actually reflects the fullness of the glory of

God and friends Jesus as he took on human flesh he took on the name of humanity and he identified with us so that he might bear before God our names and represent us completely fully as a man as a human being and finally he came in the wonder of God's plan he came not only as the high priest who needed no sacrifice for himself but he came as the sacrifice as well he as the high priest offered up himself as the perfect sacrifice because he the sinless one could die for us to atone for our sin he the sinless one could walk into the holy of holies and not die and not be burned up and so he walks into the heavenly holy of holies and he lays his own blood and his own life on that mercy seat to cover his people so that all who are in

[36 : 15] Christ may approach God and friends we've read this and we have to keep reading it because it's the right way to close this section of Ephesians in Hebrews chapter 10 listen to what the benefit of Christ as our high priest is for us therefore sisters and brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh and since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience in our bodies washed with pure water let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as the habit of son but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day dawning friends because of

Jesus we as sinful people can know a holy God and in fact he comes and he says I will dwell not amongst my people but in my people as his Holy Spirit comes into the heart of all who place their faith in Jesus Christ and are made alive in Christ God dwells with us because of Jesus our great high priest let us not neglect such a great salvation and let us draw near to God let's pray Lord thank you for the provision of Jesus our high priest and Lord thank you for the glory that he had and Lord thank you that by his work we may draw near to you we pray this in Jesus name amen