

PREPARING FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

Leviticus 8

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The first seven chapters of the Book of Leviticus had to do with five Old Testament sacrifices. In chapters 8, 9, and 10 we have three chapters dealing with the priesthood. Chapter 8 especially deals with the ordination to the priesthood of Aaron and his sons. Rather than reading the chapter in its entirety, I will read instead the first four verses, which are in effect a summary of the chapter. Everything else in the chapter kind of flows out of the theme stated in the first four verses of chapter 8: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams and the basket containing bread made without yeast, and gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.’ Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the assembly gathered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting” (NIV).

Suppose I were to give you a questionnaire and ask you to identify in order of importance the roles that you have in life. For instance: I am a son, I am a daughter, I am a father/mother, I am a husband/wife, I am a brother/sister, I am a pastor. Then we arrange all that and ask you to put them in order of importance. When the list is all said and done, you gather up all you thought you had in life and you’ve arranged them in order of importance. It dawned on me in reading Leviticus 8 that there would probably be one role missing from all of our lists that God would want on that list. It would be simply this: I am a priest.

You and I are priests. We think priests are people who wear dark clothes and white collars. We shouldn’t think of priests as being a special class. The New Testament teaches us that we are priests. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:5 “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual

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house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (NIV). Here in one sentence he gathers together the whole first ten chapters of Leviticus. In chapters 8 through 10, He said “You are a priest”; and in chapters 1 through 7 He said “You are offering up sacrifices.” All of you, in the whole body of Christendom, every person is a priest. Peter again says in 1 Peter 2:9 “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood” (NIV). John, in giving praise to Christ in Revelation 1:6, says, “[Jesus] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (NIV). And again, Revelation 5:10 declares. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God” (NIV). There’s four New Testament Scriptures very clearly teaching us that we are priests to the Lord.

If I am a priest, what am I supposed to do? I should say right at the outset that if you’re just starting being a priest, God will show you what you’re to do. We start in ministry by simply doing what is in our hands to do and trusting that God is going to guide us if our heart is right and sincere.

The priesthood of every believer is a real sharp contrast with the Old Testament, in which only a certain classification of people could be priests. A priest acted on behalf of others in order to help them get through to God. In order to have sins forgiven, you had to go through a priest. But when every one of us is a priest, that means the only intermediary between us and God is the man Christ Jesus.

False movements in the body of Christ today, and in the charismatic renewal as well, have taught a false kind of submission, that basically says, “You are not a priest directly to God. Someone else must act on your behalf. Therefore get in a chain of command and answer to your overseer and when you want to know the will of God ask him and he’ll tell you.” That is a denial of the priesthood of every believer. That is not true. Every priest ministers to God and serves people.

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I'm not doing away with order in the church, by the way. I think there's always a balance.

There's a balance between an organization which God has called, including submission to leaders, and one in which submission produces a bunch of robots. Somewhere in between is the priesthood of every believer.

This chapter teaches us quite a few things about priesthood.

I. One of the first things that the chapter is teaching about priesthood is that every priest must be called.

Verse 1 says, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron and his sons'" (NIV). The priesthood is the choice of God. Hebrews 5:4 says of Christ, "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was" (NIV). Jesus says to the entire group of the disciples in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (NIV).

Some things we ought to know about the call of God: God has called us. God wants us to know that we aren't simply trying to bust into His kingdom as He's doing all He can to keep us out.

Some people have that view of the Christian life. God really wants you in His kingdom! That's the whole idea of the call. He has called you. The call is out—it's "Whosoever will may come."

That sense of being called ought to produce a great sense of elation. It was a marvelous thing for Aaron and His sons to be called.

It really was when you look at Aaron and his sons. They come from the tribe of Levi. Genesis 49 is the story of the patriarch Jacob blessing his children. When he comes to Levi he really puts a curse on Levi. Levi has been such an angry son. Basically if you leave the tribe of Levi from Genesis 49 you don't see much hope for it. Aaron has presided over the making of the golden calf. That made God so mad that Moses had to intercede to spare Aaron's life. Then the

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tabernacle was built and God hadn't said one word one whether Aaron was going to be restored to the priesthood. But finally here in Leviticus 8 we see that God is going to use this man Aaron to be high priest even though he made the golden calf.

In this beautiful act in Leviticus 8, God is taking the family of Levi, who had the curse of their father on them, and the family of Aaron that had betrayed Him, and calling them into ministry. God doesn't call people who are already perfect. He calls people who have deficiencies in their life and He redeems them. That's what grace is all about. That call ought to be a great source of joy to us rather than something we debate about.

The New Testament says this about the call: The call is the start of a process. Jesus says to the fishermen, "Follow Me and I will make you to become." It's not an overnight arrival. It's the process of following the Lord and responding to His call. The call is security in making decisions. When we know the Lord has put His hand on our shoulder, we can have the confidence to live. We are living out what He has called us to do.

II. Following the call a second thing happened. Every priest must be washed.

Verses 5 and 6 tell us about the washing of Aaron and his sons. Before they were clothed, before they were anointed, before they offered sacrifices, before they ministered, the thing that had to occur first is that they needed to be washed. Washing was a sign and symbol of cleansing. It's very fitting that when you come to the New Testament you see this being repeated that Jesus allows Himself to be washed before His ministry ever begins. Before He preaches His first sermon. Before He does His first miracle as our great high priest He submits Himself to the washing in the river Jordan. He enters His priesthood. Although He himself had no sin, He follows the symbolic thing that had been done in the Old Testament—a priest was washed.

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Through Peter He tells us who have sin to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38, NIV). He tells the disciples when He’s finished with His work on earth, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” Matthew 28:19, NIV). He’s saying the priesthood of every believer begins with a call but it’s followed by a washing. By water baptism. The symbol of the cleansing from sin.

I know the question might be raised, “Do I need to be baptized in water to be a Christian? If I simply confess my faith in the Lord, isn’t that enough? Why do I need to be baptized in water?”

I put the question differently: “Will you at the beginning of your Christian life consciously disobey a clear order of the Lord?” Jesus does not say, “If you *want to* be baptized.” Jesus is saying, “Be baptized.” You wouldn’t start your Christian life disobeying an order from the Lord. The Lord wants you to go through that process as a physical mark of your following Him, and as the sign of the cleansing He’s done in your life.

You might say, “I don’t want to be baptized, because people will see me.” That’s the whole point! It’s a public witness. You want to be seen.

You might say, “I’ll wait until I get older.” No. When you come to faith, that’s the time.

You might say, “It’s not necessary for me. It may be for other people but it’s not for me.” Here’s my reply: Give me the written exemption the Lord has given you.

The Old Testament priests were not only washed on the day of their ordination, but throughout their service as priests there were many washings. But never a washing quite like this. It’s interesting that in the New Testament not only were you baptized, but in our Christian experience, as we accumulate grime on our soul, we’re told in 1 John 1:9 that if we confess our sins He will be faithful and just to cleanse us—wash us—from all our iniquities. So washing is part of the priesthood. We need it.

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III. A third step of the priesthood is that every priest must be uniformed (Leviticus 8:7–9,13).

A uniform draws attention to the person's office, to their responsibilities, rather than to the person him- or herself. For instance, if we see a man in a judge's robe we immediately have respect because he's wearing the uniform of a judge. Or a policeman or a nurse. They wear a uniform so we might respect their office. There is a sense that God wanted His priest to be uniformed that he might convey there is something about the office they hold that people will see.

There were two kinds of uniforms. There was the uniform for the ordinary priest and the uniform for the high priest.

A. For the uniform for the ordinary priest, there were three things given in Leviticus. First of all, the garment of fine linen which he wore next to his body. I call this the fine linen of integrity. In the New Testament, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, is described as wearing "fine linen, bright and clean...[representing] the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8, NIV). In Revelation 19:14, even the armies of heaven are described as being clothed in fine linen; these are God's righteous children. There is sense as we transfer the imagery that priests like you and me are to be dressed in the fine linen of integrity in our lives.

And we are to have the sash of service. That was the next garment of the ordinary priest—the sash. The purpose of the sash was to tie the flowing robes together so one could have freedom of movement as they did their activity and be free for service. Jesus, we find in John 13, girded Himself with a towel. He laid aside His garments and girded Himself with a towel. He was a servant. So here is sense that priests are to see themselves as servants.

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Then the ordinary priest also had a headband or a turban. I call it the turban of sobriety. The New Testament says to us in 1 Peter 1:13, “Gird up the loins of your minds” (KJV). Put a belt around your mind and cinch it up. The idea is, Peter has written to Christians who are suffering and he’s saying, “You may think all kinds of untrue thoughts about God when you’re suffering, when you’re going through hardships: ‘Where is God?’ ‘Why is He letting me go through this?’ Cinch up your mind and be sober. And so much the more as you see the day of the Lord coming.” Paul talks about taking every thought captive to the Lord.

So the dress of the ordinary priest as we transfer it to us is seeking to follow the Lord in integrity, following Him with service, and setting our minds to really think and follow after the Lord.

B. The garment of the high priest was more elaborate because his office was more elaborate. Just like in an academic procession. You see Ph.Ds in their academic regalia and somebody with a B.A. and there’s quite a difference. So with the high priest there is something more significant occurring.

He had on what the ordinary priest had on plus he had a robe. Blue, and woven in one piece, without seam. Kind of like a poncho. We see the Gospel of John noting a very delicate phrase where he indicates that when Christ was crucified they took his robe which was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Perhaps Christ was consciously living out the fact that He had such a robe. Although His perhaps didn’t have the ornateness of the high priest.

The priest on top of the robe was to put an ephod. I don’t know how to describe that, but it might be like a ski jacket. It didn’t have sleeves. It was a front piece and back piece and tied together with gold chains. One of the significant things about the ephod was the fact that on each shoulder was an onyx stone. On the onyx stone were described six names. All twelve names of the tribes of Israel. On the ephod on top of it was a ten-inch square cloth piece the same color and

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consistency as the ephod. It was called the breastpiece. On it were four rows of stones, three stones in each row, and on each stone was inscribed a name of a tribe of Israel. Then in the pouch of the breastpiece was something called the Urim and the Thummim, which is really nontranslatable. It perhaps means “Light and Perfection.” It was evidently a kind of stone that had a shiny side and a flat side. When the people of God, the whole nation, needed a decision, they’d come to the high priest and say, “What does the Lord say?” He’d pull these out and if they both came up the shiny side, the Lord said Yes. If they both came up the flat side, the Lord said No. If they came up one shiny and one flat it was, “Do whatever you want, the Lord doesn’t care.” I think the Lord has some of those perspectives in our lives. I had one major decision in my life when I couldn’t get a Yes or No. I finally felt the Lord saying to me, “I’ll be with you whatever you do—do it.” The Urim and the Thummim.

Then the high priest had on a turban. The thing different about his turban was the gold plate on his forehead inscribed “HOLY TO THE LORD” (Exodus 28:36, NIV). In the New Testament we read in Revelation that we’re going to have His name on our forehead. He’s going to mark us, stamp us, on our brow. That’s symbolic but we’ll be recognized as the Lord’s people.

What is really neat to me about the high priest is that on his shoulders and on his chest were inscribed the names of his people. Whenever the names of his people were inscribed they’re in a precious gem and a gold setting. The Lord carries us on His shoulders and He carries us on His heart. When He represents us to the Father, He supports us and He cherishes us. When we come to grips with our low self-esteem and our feelings of failure and inadequacies and worthlessness and all the things Satan tries to program us with, the Lord is forever saying to us, “You’re a precious gem to Me and you’re set in a gold setting. I never think of you as something cheap. I don’t think of you as dime store jewelry. You’re very exquisite and precious.”

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IV. The next thing in this that we see in Leviticus 8 is every priest must be anointed

(Leviticus 8:10–12,30).

Aaron was clothed and anointed before his sons were. The same way with Christ. He was anointed prior to His disciples. His ministry came first.

Psalms 133 describes the anointing of the high priest as something like a precious oil that flowed on Aaron's head and down his hair and beard and on the collar of his robe and on his robe. It's a wonderful image of the high priest's anointing. There was only one kind of anointing oil. When it was poured out it was something very precious. Just like when unity happens among believers it's something too rare and it's very precious. There's to be a liberal anointing.

Christ was anointed liberally. In fact the word "Christ" means "the anointed one." The whole idea of pouring oil is to say "God's Spirit is flowing upon this man." It's setting a person or thing aside to be dedicated to God. They not only anointed Aaron and His sons, they anointed all the articles of furniture in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle itself. It was all anointed with oil. It was set aside for God's purposes.

I got a new insight in looking at that when we anoint the sick with oil. I always think anointing with oil has to do with healing. You apply oil on a wound and it helps heal. But the anointing with oil is more than that. Anointing of oil from the Old Testament perspective is to set aside a person or a thing for a special use by God. When you come forward and you're anointed with oil or at home because you're sick, we're not really praying for your healing but we're praying that you will be set aside for special activity by God. The activity you need is this healing activity and we pray it will even go past that, to be set aside for special activity that the Spirit of God might rest upon you in a special way.

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V. A fifth thing that happens in preparation for priesthood is before you can assume the priesthood you've got to offer sacrifices.

Aaron and his sons were called to sacrifice. There were three sacrifices: the sin offering, which was for sins of omission or unintentional sins they did; the burnt offering, which symbolized the dedication of their whole life to God; and the peace offering, the thanksgiving to God, blood from which was applied to their right ear, their right thumb and their right big toe. Then they could eat some from that peace offering.

We are told in the Scriptures that Christ was a high priest who didn't need, like all the other priests, to offer sacrifices for His own sins. He had no sins! We learn as priests that in order to minister for God we must have the sin question dealt with in our life. Priests belong to the human race. Priests are sinful and priests need redemption. If we wait for the idea that God can't use us until we're 100 percent perfect, then we're going to be waiting until we get to heaven before God will ever use us. The fact is, God uses people who have failed but who keep coming back to the cross and finding His restoration and His helping power.

I want to comment on the anointing for a moment with blood, the right ear, the right thumb and the right big toe. It's very beautiful that these parts of the body would be anointed—our ear that we might hear from God; our thumb representing our hand that we might work for God; and our toe representing our foot that we might walk with God. That's all part of being a priest—hearing from God, working for God, and walking with God.

At communion today we blend together these first eight chapters in the Book of Leviticus. The communion is all that's left over from the sacrificial system. Sacrifices in the Jewish faith ended centuries ago. They've never been practiced in the Christian faith. But here is the language of sacrifice. Here is the remainder, here is the reminder that a lamb was given, that a sin offering

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was made, that a burnt offering was made, that a guilt offering was made, that a peace offering was made. Here is what we share in. Here is what the Lord told us: “When you drink this, you drink My blood. When you eat this, you eat My body. If you don’t do this you don’t have a part of Me.” He’s speaking in the language of the peace offering, that we take hold of Him. And that we put Him into our lives.

Today when we worship the Lord, we do not bring a ram or an ox. We do not bring a goat or a sheep. We have represented for us the blood of Christ; The sacrifice still is necessary, but the sacrifice is once and for all on Calvary.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, as we approach this communion time today, we think now about the Scripture that You have given to us, and we want to rejoice in Your call upon our lives. We want to hear again Your word “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). We thank You, Lord, for Your call upon our life. We thank You, Lord, for washing us, for giving us baptism and for giving us other inward washings in our walk with You, for we do accumulate things that are not of You. We thank You for Your cleansing. For those here who have come to know You but have not yet been baptized, we pray that each will be obedient for what Your instruction is in washing. We thank You, Lord, thank You that You’ve clothed us. You intend for us to walk in integrity, to be of service to You and to others, and Lord, to have a mind girded up to think after You in this day when so many thoughts circulate in this world which are not of You, Lord. You desire to anoint us, to empower us to serve You, to let Your Spirit come upon us so that in our labor and service we might be effective for You. Lord, it's not Your desire that we just occupy bleacher seats, but that we be involved as priests and be anointed. We thank You, Lord, that when it comes to sacrifice, You’re the sacrifice. You, Lord,

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have impressed us with the fact that indeed sin brings death, but You have provided in Jesus a substitute so that we might go unpunished, and He might be punished for us—that the guilt and the penalty for our sin might be placed upon Him, that we might go free. At this communion time we remember that and we give thanks to Jesus who is our lamb, given for us. Having been set free from sin and having been forgiven all sin, not just some sin as Old Testament sacrifices were good for, but having been forgiven all sin, we are free to really walk in newness of life. Free to celebrate this moment in thanksgiving. Bless this time of communion. May Your Spirit really be here and present with us as we share it together. In Christ's name. Amen.