

Text: Exod. 28:1-5
Title: God's priests
Time: 5/7/2023 am
Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have learned over these many months together that the Book of Exodus is about "the way out" of slavery. *Exodus* means *the way out*. To read Exodus is to read about redemption and deliverance from bondage.

The Book begins with a description of Israel's need for a deliverer and then the account of how that deliverer is graciously provided by the Lord in the person of Moses in chapters 1-4.

It goes on to describe Israel's miraculous deliverance in chapters 5 through 18. Beginning with that first miracle of Moses's rod turning to a snake and ending with the parting of the Red Sea, God's work of deliverance was resisted at every step by the enemy, but it was ultimately irresistible. God's determination to save His people was unstoppable.

And in this final section (19-40), we learn what the life of the delivered is like. It is a covenantal life according to chapter 19, a lawful life in chapters 20-24, and a worshipping life, beginning in chapter 25 through the end of the Book.

The tabernacle or dwelling place of God is at the center of the worshipping life of the delivered, and so our study has spent some time examining the furniture and materials of the tabernacle, and we learned along the way what it means to have a worshipping life.

Primarily, it means worshipping God the way He told us to worship Him – the regulative principle of worship. Early chapters give specific instructions, and the later chapters describe how those instructions were followed in detail.

Having completed our study of the glory of the things of the tabernacle, this morning we begin now to focus on the very important persons of the tabernacle, God's priests. Just as the things of the tabernacle teach us how to have a worshipping life, so also does God's design for the priesthood.

The form of our English word *priest* comes from the Greek word we translate as *elder, presbuteros*. The Greek word translated as *priest* in our New Testament translations is *hiereus*, which is also used to translate the Hebrew word for *priest, cohen*, in the Greek translation of the OT, the LXX.

Hiereus is a word that means *sacred-one* or *holy-one*. It is related to the adjective *hieros*, which means *holy*. The adjective is used in 2 Tim. 3:15, where Paul tells Timothy that he was blessed to have known the "*holy* Scriptures" from his childhood, which had made him wise unto salvation.

So, the Scriptures are holy in the sense that they are inspired by God as His book to make sinners understand supernaturally how Jesus can save them from sin. The Bible is like no common book in that sense, but a sacred one. And when the Bible speaks of a *hiereus* or a *priest*, it speaks of a person who is set apart by God in an uncommon way. He no longer belongs in the category we call *ordinary* or *typical*.

So, what does priesthood have to do with the worshipping life of the one delivered by God? Martin Luther answered that question biblically after centuries of confusion over it.

Luther grew up in a Christendom in which only the ordained clergy were priests. Through their power to administer the sacraments, they were the mediators between God and man from cradle to the grave. Luther called this arrangement *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520).

Luther wrote: “It is faith that makes men priests, faith that unites them to Christ, and gives them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whereby they become filled with all holy grace and heavenly power. The inward anointing — this oil, better than any that ever came from the horn of bishop or pope — gives them not the name only, but the nature, the purity, the power of priests; and this anointing have all they received who are believers in Christ” [quoted in Schaff, 7.25].

This is Peter’s doctrine as well. Writing to otherwise ordinary believers scattered all over the known world, he tells them that they are anything but ordinary in Christ: “lively stones, . . . built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5); and again, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (v. 9).

God designed the Aaronic priesthood in our passage, in part, to teach every believer something important about what it means to live the worshipping life as God’s priest. I will highlight three things from our passage this morning.

I. God’s priests are brought near (v. 1).

Illustration: Last weekend I enjoyed some time with our sister church in Windham, Heritage Baptist Church. I met a young couple, just newly married, who also were visiting the church that weekend, with whom I had some surprising connections. The husband Jordan knew my son Brandon. And the wife Hannah knew my brother Kent. Jordan had been my son’s dorm supervisor at BJU, and Hannah grew up in my brother’s church. We had an especially nice visit together in recognition of these family relations.

Application: The Lord calls out a family relationship in His design for Israel's priesthood. Three times in these five verses the Lord mentions that Aaron is Moses's brother (vv. 1, 2, 4). The phrase at the beginning of verse 1 in our KJV, *take unto thee*, is a significant instruction. We could translate it literally, *bring near to yourself*. The Lord is highlighting a connection between Moses and Aaron, between the one sent for the deliverance of Israel, and the one chosen to be the high priest of Israel. Ordinarily, Moses is very much alone in the book of Exodus. Only he was allowed to ascend Mount Sinai. But here, Moses is commanded specifically to bring Aaron and his sons near to himself. They now belong next to him.

The author of Hebrews (likely Luke) picks up on this nearness of Moses and Aaron when he describes Christ Jesus as our "Apostle and High Priest" (Heb. 3:1, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus"). Moses, the apostle or sent deliverer, and Aaron, the high priest, come together in the work of Jesus Christ for us.

The author goes on to say that Jesus Christ, as our Apostle or Sent Deliverer, is greater than Moses, and then he says that Jesus Christ, as our High Priest, is greater than Aaron. He describes this greatness as that of the royal priesthood of Melchizedek, which was prophesied in Psalm 110. Jesus combines the office of Moses the sent deliverer/leader and the office of Aaron the priest/mediator as "a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek was both priest and king, and this is the greatness of the deliverance work of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus your King and High Priest? Is He your Moses and your Aaron?

But Hebrews 3:1 also says that this Jesus Christ is the Apostle and High Priest of *our* profession. In other words, His priestly Melchizedekian order is our order. We are partakers of the

same heavenly calling. Jesus is the royal High Priest, and we are His royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). And what this means for us practically is that we can draw near to Him and with Him for our deliverance and that of others. Hebrews emphasizes this wonderful truth:

Heb. 4:16 – “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (NASB).

Heb. 7:19 – “there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God” (NASB).

Heb. 7:25 – “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (NASB).

Heb. 10:22 – “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Heb. 11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (ESV).

This is our profession, our calling, our vocation, to draw near unto and with our Moses. We are those who have been brought near to the Lord Jesus Christ as God’s priests. We are brought near for a great work of eternal consequence.

Can we see this morning that we who are saved by grace through faith are not only recipients of eternal life, but also commissioned as priests to do this work of drawing near? Is it enough that we are saved while others are lost? No, for we are God’s priesthood. We have a mission of deliverance for

the world. Jesus said, "As the Father sent Me, so send I you" (John 20:21).

II. God's priests are clothed with priestly garments (vv. 2-5).

Illustration: I have a picture on my computer that I took of my son Kent during one of our church workdays in which we were working on the hill next to our church. The trees had just been removed, and we had something of a mud-slide left. Kent is holding a bolder that he seems to be moving from point a to point b while standing in the middle of the mud. He is covered from head to foot.

Application: That is the picture taken of a high priest named Joshua in the days of the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 3:1-5). Joshua's filthy robes were exchanged for the holy garments of the priesthood. This exchange happens to every true believer, saved from the filth of his sin by grace:

His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange!
Clothed in my sin, Christ suffered 'neath God's rage.
Draped in His righteousness, I'm justified.
In Christ I live, for in my place He died.

I cling to Christ, and marvel at the cost:
Jesus forsaken, God estranged from God.
Bought by such love, my life is not my own.
My praise-my all-shall be for Christ alone.

His robes for mine: what cause have I for dread?
God's daunting Law Christ mastered in my stead.
Faultless I stand with righteous works not mine,
Saved by my Lord's vicarious death and life.

His robes for mine: God's justice is appeased.
Jesus is crushed, and thus the Father's pleased.

Christ drank God's wrath on sin, then cried "'Tis done!"
Sin's wage is paid; propitiation won.

His robes for mine: such anguish none can know.
Christ, God's beloved, condemned as though His foe.
He, as though I, accursed and left alone;
I, as though He, embraced and welcomed home! [Chris Anderson]

Have you taken Jesus's robes of righteousness for the filthy rags of your own righteousness? Each true priest of God has.

III. God's priests minister for the Lord (vv. 1, 3, 4).

Application: Our text makes clear three times that the Lord appointed these priests of Israel *for Himself*. They were chosen to serve Him and not themselves. The same is true for New Testament believers like the Apostle Paul.

In Romans 15:16, Paul describes his life's work metaphorically as that of a priest. His offerings to the Lord were the Gentiles he had helped come to faith in Christ and the churches he planted and disciplined. In that verse he says he did so as "the minister of Jesus Christ." When one scans the writings of Paul, we come to know that he took his priestly vocation very seriously, as should we.

Paul explains that our priesthood has the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation); the ministry of intercession (1 Tim. 2:1, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men); the ministry of self-sacrifice (Rom. 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,

which is your reasonable service"); and the ministry of the local church (Heb. 10:21-25, "And having an high priest over the house of God. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised); and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."). God's priests live for the Lord.

Conclusion: Hebrews sums up the Royal Priesthood of Jesus Christ in a simple way: "Who was faithful to Him who appointed Him" (Heb. 3:2). It is His faithfulness that saves us from our sins and makes us priests. But what will the Lord say to us when He assesses our faithfulness to our royal priesthood? Have we been faithful priests for our Lord?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching