

Text: Exod. 28:6-12

Title: "The Ephod: Strapped upon our Great High Priest"

Time: 6/4/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: A few days ago, I was on my walk up over Hooper Hill when I saw ahead of me a sight that warmed my heart and excited my dog. A young mother came out of her driveway for a walk just ahead of me. She was walking two dogs, a leash in each hand, and she had strapped on to her torso one of those baby carriers that lets you carry your baby in front of you handsfree. She had a young girl in the carrier, and one a bit older in tow walking with her.

As I saw that precious mom giving her daughters and her dogs some fresh air on a beautiful day, I realized how easy my job is compared to hers. She is like my daughter and daughter-in-law this way. These ladies strap on their baby carriers and wear my grandsons close to their hearts as they get done what they have to do, whether that is walk the dog or get the shopping done. I do not mind holding my grandsons, but I cannot say I want one of them strapped to my chest.

In our study of the details of God's design for the garments of Israel's priests, we come first to an article of clothing that reminds me very much of these baby carriers, which enable mothers to carry children close to their hearts. It is called an *ephod*, and the one described in our passage this morning was a special ephod worn only by the high priest.

The word *ephod* is related to a word that can mean *close-fitting* or even *plated-on*. In Isa. 30:22, the word refers to the way idols were gold-plated. This garment was given this name because God designed it to be tight-fitting. He did not want it to be loosely worn.

The ephod consisted of two pieces, front and back, that were connected on the shoulders by gold clasps, which provided the setting for an onyx stone each, upon which were written the names of the twelve sons of Israel in order of their birth. To keep it closely bound to the priest, the design included a belt or a wrap of the same material to tie it down tightly.

We might say that the tightly-fitting ephod is that part of the priestly garment, which teaches us that we are tied tightly to or strapped closely upon our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. It speaks of the nearness of His people to Him. It is our nearness to Him, of which the author of Hebrews writes, "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" (10:21-22).

Like a mother wants a child to be near her, the Lord wants us to be near Him. The message of the ephod is that we can draw near to God because Jesus has drawn near to us. Our weak human heart often cries out, "Forget me not" (Ps. 10:12, "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble"; Ps. 74:19, "O deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor forever"). The ephod reminds us that God remembers us for He is reminded by our Aaron, Jesus Christ (v. 12b). The ephod reminds, "he forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Ps. 9:12).

Three elements of the close-fitting ephod are emphasized in our passage - its material, its stones, and the shoulders that carry the stones. Each of these features symbolizes spiritual truth, which binds us inseparably to the heart of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The material and the mediation we need (vv. 6-8).

Illustration: In 2016 Elon Musk's SpaceX company published a plan for colonizing Mars. Mars, of course, is called the Red Planet. We have some ugly red staining on the front of our church building, and that is basically the color of everything on Mars. The planet's red color is from iron oxide, so we might say that the one color that dominates existence on Mars is rust. If someone grew up in a colony on Mars and then came to earth for a visit, the rich colors we enjoy as earthlings would undoubtedly be one of the most pleasant and surprising things about his visit.

Application: Rich color is one of the most pleasant and surprising things about God's design for the tabernacle, the ephod of the High Priest included. Here gold threads are interwoven with blue, purple, and scarlet colored fine Egyptian linen.

We have seen these colors before. The tabernacle's inner curtain covering its ceiling and walls (Exod. 26:1), its veil separating the holy of holies from the holy place (26:31, 36:35), the front door of the tabernacle (26:36, 36:37), and the courtyard gate (27:16, 37:18) were all comprised of blue, purple, and scarlet material.

You may remember that these colors remind us of the mediation of Christ, the Messiah, for sinful man's reconciliation to his holy God. The interwoven gold symbolizes the deity of the Messiah. The blue reminds us that as our mediator, Jesus is the prophet who speaks God's saving truth from heaven; the purple reminds us that He is the royal king of the universe who possesses all authority in heaven and in earth and who promises to crush our enemy serpent under our feet someday; and the scarlet reminds us that He is our priest, who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

This prophetic, royal, and priestly work of God's only Son was necessary for us to be reconciled to an offended God. But as we think of which parts of the tabernacle bore these colors, more wondrous truth about our Lord's ministry as our mediator bubbles up to the surface. The inner curtain of the tabernacle reminds us that when we come to God, Christ is our destination. The saved are saved in Christ (Eph. 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ").

The veil, the door, and the gate remind us that when we come to God, Jesus Christ is the only way to get there (John 10:9, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture"; John 14:6, "Jesus saith unto him [Thomas], I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me").

The ephod, closely fitted on the high priest, reminds us that when we come to God, Jesus is our forerunner whom we follow on the narrow way (Heb. 6:19-20, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedec").

Have you been brought near to God by this Prophet, King and Priest? Are you trusting Him to do so? No one ever cared for you and me like Jesus. He is the one mediator between God and man who has done the work to save us from our sin. Trust in Him, and He will save you and bind you like the ephod inseparably to His heart.

II. The stones and the sealing we need (vv. 9-11a).

Illustration: In ancient times the signet ring pressed into wax formed a seal that became evidentiary proof of ownership. In our passage, names are engraved in stone rather than wax, so the permanence of this sealing is one of its wonderful attributes. A seal like this was not only a mark of ownership, but also a guarantee of an agreement made.

Application: Sealing is a blessing that happens to a believer when he trusts Christ for salvation. The Spirit of Christ indwells the believer, and the resulting change in life is the proof of His ownership of the sinner and the guarantee of salvation's promise of eternal life.

One of the great hymns of the faith is "Come Thou Fount." The song is a prayer for God's salvation blessing. The third verse prays for the sealing of the heart:

"O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to
thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I
love;

Here's my heart; O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts
above."

The stones of the ephod contained a seal not in wax, but in onyx stone. The onyx along with bdellium were precious stones that harkened back to the sinless existence of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:12). The stones tell us that every time a sinner prays, "Here's my heart, Lord; take and seal it for your courts above – for a return to the Garden," Jesus answers, "Yes I will" with His Holy Spirit.

Our New Testament speaks of this salvation blessing. (2 Cor. 1:21-22, "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts"; Eph. 1:13, "In

whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise"; Eph 4:30, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"; 2 Tim. 2:19, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity").

Have you been sealed? Is your name engraved on the stones of your High Priest, Jesus Christ? The way to answer that is to honestly assess whether there have been changes in your life caused by the saving presence of the Holy Spirit.

But how do we know that these names of the sons of Jacob have anything to do with you and me? Paul tells us we can become a son of Abraham, just like the sons of Jacob, by simply believing on Abraham's Son, Jesus Christ. God promised that Abraham would be not only the father of the Jews, but of many nations:

Rom. 4:16-17, "Therefore it [justification – being declared righteous before God] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all. (As it is written, 'I have made thee a father of many nations') before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."

So Aaron's stones tell us that we are sealed too, that like the sons of Jacob, our names are engraved on the stones of our High Priest. We belong to Him. We have a guarantee that we shall someday be with Him.

III. The shoulders and the future we need (vv. 11b-12).

Application: The ephod points to the importance of the shoulders of the high priest. The onyx stones there are set in gold clasps, which hold the stones and the ephod together. Gold, of course, is deity in tabernacle design. Just like the engraved stones are set securely in the golden clasps, so also is the eternal destiny of the believer in Christ set firmly in His hands (John 10:28-29, "And I [Jesus] give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand"). These hands are the gold settings of our stones.

And the settings are set on strong shoulders, the shoulders of the promised Messiah (Isa. 9:6-7, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this"; Isa. 22:22, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open").

These powerful shoulders of future governance are also the compassionate shoulders of the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep (Luke 15:4-7, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep

which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance”).

Has the Good Shepherd rejoiced over you? Have you been carried on His shoulder, once lost but now found? Or are you one of those ninety and nine just persons, who believe that they need no repentance?

Conclusion: Our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, served His ephod mission faithfully, but our understanding of His faithfulness is not complete until we realize that He has given us an ephod to wear as well, the way Eli gave young Samuel one (1 Sam. 2:18). Ours is not an ephod of ministry in the tabernacle, but one for the ministry of the gospel in the local church. Do we wear our linen ephod close to our hearts, or loosely? Will our High Priest say to us one day, “Well done, My priest. You wore your ephod well”?

“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