

Text: Exod. 28:36-43

Title: "Finishing touches of the priestly garments"

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Introduction: One of the jobs I had working my way through college was at a place called Wheatland Crafts. After working there a while, I was given the responsibility of building octagon boxes out of oak. The box had a lid that fit on top of the box. I had to cut the eight box pieces, form them to the box bottom, glue them together, cut the eight top pieces, glue them together to fit on top of the box, and then sand both down after the glue dried.

When I first got the job, I started in the department where everyone started their career with Wheatland Crafts, in the finishing room. That was where the boxes and picture frames and other crafts we made were given a coat of stain and some kind of lacquer. It was hot during the South Carolina summer, and none of the Wheatland Craft buildings were air conditioned, Working in the finishing room felt the hottest because you became covered with what you were putting on the crafts, while wearing a large suffocating respirator to keep the chemicals from getting into your lungs.

Although these finishing touches took a lot of work, they were necessary before the rough boxes that I had made were fit to sit on the shelf at Hobby Lobby for customers to purchase.

Our passage finishes the Lord's instructions for the garments of Israel's priests. We might be tempted to assume that these last verses are less consequential than what has come before in chapter 28. After introducing the project in vv. 1-5, the passage gives directions for the ephod and its shoulder pieces (vv. 6-14), the breast-piece and its lights and perfectings, the Urim and Thummim (vv. 15-30), and the blue robe (vv. 31-35).

Now, beginning in verse 36 and continuing to the end of the chapter, the project reaches its finishing stage. The Lord is putting the finishing touches on His design for the priestly garments, and as He does so He emphasizes three necessities of the true worship of the true God of the Bible: holiness, priestly ministry, and covering. These will be our focus this morning.

I. The signet and the sinless holiness that belongs to the Lord (vv. 36-38).

Illustration: When a Hobby Lobby customer made the decision to purchase one of the boxes I made, they did not do so because of my craftsmanship. My box was only a placesetting for what the customer really wanted. The lid on the box was hollow to make room for some beautiful needlework that would complete the lid. The needle work could contain a nice landscape or some important holiday message like, "I love you, Mom." It was the finishing touch of that needlework that made the piece of craftsmanship attractive to a customer.

Application: The gold plate called a *signet* is that part of the priestly garment that makes the ministry of our high priest, Jesus Christ, attractive to the Lord. As a signet, it is an engraving, the third such engraving included in the garments of the high priest. You may remember the other two, the content of both being the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, one set on the shoulder stones and the other on the breast-piece of the high priest. Our Priest, Jesus Christ, has strong enough shoulders and a loving enough breast to bring us as our Mediator to the Lord. Those engravings said much about the way we have been accepted by Jesus as His own people.

This last engraving says much about the way that Jesus has been accepted by His Father as the One Mediator between God and man. He is accepted because He is "Holy to the Lord." This is the opinion of the Father, deity without humanity, so the message is engraved on a plate of pure gold. In the

pronouncement of the Father, Jesus is His Beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased, announced at both His baptism and transfiguration (Matt. 3:17, 17:5, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22).

These announcements declared the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Isa. 42:1, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon Him. He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Matt. 12:17-19). The blue chord that holds the golden announcement to the forehead of the high priest reminds us that this message comes from a voice from heaven, just as it did at Jesus's baptism and transfiguration.

The Lord is announcing that this Priest is holy to the Lord (literally, that He has the holiness belonging to the Lord). He is holy God incarnate. He is the Sinless One, which enables Him to save sinners like you and me: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Heb. 7:25-27).

Not having to die for His own sins, Jesus could die for our sins, as our passage indicates (v. 38). That word *iniquity* in our Bibles refers to the acts of sin (Gen. 15:16), our sinful nature (2 Sam. 22:24), the legal guilt caused by our sin (Job 10:14), and the punishment our sin deserves (1 Sam. 28:10). To bear this iniquity incurs this penalty, which is death (see v. 43). The Bible says "the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). But this Sinless One, to Whom holiness belongs, died in our place, bearing our iniquity, and making us and our gifts to the Lord holy gifts (1 Pet. 2:24, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed").

Has He healed you? Is He the Savior you are trusting to have died in your place? Do you see that you are a sinner in need of a Savior? If not, you must not understand the difference between God's law and your own.

For those who know they need a Savior, the glorious last phrase of verse 38 is true: we are *accepted before the Lord*. George Needham: "The golden crown ever kept them in remembrance of Jehovah's absolute holiness; this must never be out of mind. Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord our God. Therefore in the burning rays of His holiness, we would be consumed. There is no holiness inherent in us, none wrought out by us, that could abide the scrutiny of His searching light, but the holiness of our Priest covereth us even as His blood cleanseth us. Believers are in Christ, and Christ is for them. All that He has done is for them; all that He is doing is for their salvation; all that He has is given to them, and all that He is in royal splendor, clothed and crowned, he shares with them. 'The glory that thou gavest me I have given them.' There is no other possible method whereby it can be said of any, 'accepted before the Lord'" (*Substance and Shadow*, 188-189).

II. The tunic, the turban, and the sash and the priestly ministry that serves the Lord (vv. 39-41).

Illustration: The phrase "form follows function" was coined by the architect Louis H. Sullivan, the father of the Chicago School of architecture and a pioneer in the development of the skyscraper. He was the mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright, who clarified his master's slogan by modifying it. He taught that "form follows function" means "form and function are one."

Application: In His design for the garments of His priests, the Lord discloses a connection between form and function. He gives them different names: *beauty* and *glory*. Form is beauty and function is glory. This is true of both the garments of the sons of Aaron (v. 40) and of Aaron himself (v. 2). It is true of

every believer as God's priest as well: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Existence in marvelous light is form and beauty; showing forth praises is function and glory.

Much has been said of the form/beauty aspect of these garments throughout the passage. In this paragraph, we see that this form also has some glorious functions. The garments were given not only to make God's priest distinguishable in their appearance, but also in their work. The job description is given in verse 41, where three functions are listed:

1. They were to be anointed, the oil being a symbol of the Holy Spirit. God's priests must be empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish their ministry. Rom. 8:13-14, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." We must do what God's Spirit wants, not our flesh.

2. They were to be consecrated. Sometimes translated *ordained*, this word tells Moses to "fill their hands." Moses is to put responsibility into the hands of God's priests. They must accept the Lord's assignment to accomplish their ministry. In Aaron's time, the tabernacle was the center of that assignment. In our NT times, the local church is at the center of this assignment. Local church membership is a consecration to, an ordination for, and a filling of the hand with the Lord's assignment.

3. They were to be sanctified, or set apart. Paul understood what this means for NT priests like us: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). He believed the same was true for the

Roman local church: "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ" (vv. 5-6).

How are we doing when it comes to our priestly ministry? Are we daily filled with the Spirit for the task; have we accepted the biblical responsibilities the Lord has assigned to us as local church members; and do we see our lives as separated unto this gospel ministry, helping our High Priest bring needy sinners to salvation through the good news?

III. The undergarments and the penetrating covering for approaching the Lord (vv. 42-43).

Illustration: Last April the *Smithsonian Magazine* published an article titled, "When Did Clothing Originate?" Its author said in part: "Standards of body cover vary across cultures. But many people would be mortified to be caught unclad in public. For folks in cold climates, insufficient clothing can be fatal, as I sensed in Siberia. Yet no other creatures don garments. Why our ancestors, alone in the entire animal kingdom, adopted clothes is one of those big questions that science has only recently begun to tackle."

Application: After reading the article, I came to the conclusion that the author demonstrated that humans have always worn clothes, but he still did not begin to tackle the question his title posed, "When Did Clothing Originate?"

Bible readers and believers, of course, know the answer to that question. Our passage speaks of the need to cover the nakedness of the priests as they approach the Lord, and this covering of nakedness reminds us of the need of fallen Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When they sinned, they knew they were naked, and they knew they could no longer approach the Lord. Scripturally, the shame of human nakedness is part

of the curse that God put on man and his world in response to his sin. His purpose was to teach man about his need for covering when we approach the Lord. This sense of shame has nothing to do with the animal kingdom, by the way.

Just like Adam and Eve, hiding in the bushes of Eden, we are born into this world estranged from an unapproachable God. This is true because we are sons and daughters of Adam. Rom. 5:12, "Therefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Adam's sin so penetrated the human race that even our offspring are born sinners, estranged from God. Our text mentions Aaron's seed in this regard (v. 43b).

But the Lord had a solution for the shame of Adam and Eve. He killed an animal and used the skins to make clothes for them. A covering from a bloody sacrifice covered the shame of their sin and let them approach the Lord again. The undergarments of the priests teach us the same lesson about approaching the Lord. Jesus's sacrifice covers the shame of our sin clothing us in His righteousness. It covers us underneath our exterior, cleansing our hearts and clearing our conscience.

Illustration: My son Kent had to do a paper recently on his philosophy of Christian ministry, and he organized his thoughts around a verse that mention the parts of us that need covering: "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5). As God's priests, we approach our Lord covered by the sacrifice of Christ, with a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith that is not fake. He turns us not away.

Conclusion: These are the finishing touches of the priestly garments. Symbolized here are the sinless holiness that belongs to our Lord, the priestly ministry that serves our Lord, and the penetrating covering that approaches our Lord.

The Scripture author who calls New Testament believers God's *priests* is the Apostle Peter. That is shocking in a way, once we remember what Peter was like. He was the gruff fisherman who often stripped for his work under the hot sun on the Sea of Galilee.

But reading his description of what it means to be a New Testament believer, it seems he had studied these passages about Israel's tabernacle and priesthood. He wrote about us as God's priests this way: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Peter's identity changed from fisherman to priest. He taught that the same must happen for every believer. Let's determine to learn to be that and to do that, like Peter the fisherman did.

"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*