

Text: Exod. 29:29-37

Title: "Priesthood Succession"

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Introduction: The Apostle John records the very first Lord's Day gathering of the disciples of Christ in John 20. As He promised us, He has not missed a meeting of His true churches since. On that occasion Jesus told those who had followed him, "Peace be unto you. As my Father hath sent Me, so send I you." Jesus was preparing and sending these disciples as His ministry successors, those who would come after Him to do the Lord's work.

They would become His successors through the power of the Holy Spirit upon them, who is the Divine Successor of the ministry of Christ. He blows upon them commanding that they receive the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to take His place.

Later in Galilee, Christ commissioned His disciples to make other disciples, who would be their successors. Just as He had prepared them to be His successors, they were now to prepare others to succeed them in the ministry. This Great Commission to prepare our successors is our mission today as the Savior's New Testament priesthood.

As we have undertaken the study in Exodus of the Old Testament priesthood designed by the Lord for ministry to Israel, our own hearts have been challenged about the responsibility that fills our hands as New Testament believers. 1 Pet. 2:5, "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."

The Apostle Paul spoke of his successors as spiritual sacrifices of his priestly ministry, those who had come to the Savior

through his gospel ministry, whom he had left behind in the cities of Asia and Europe to continue the work of the Lord in their local churches : “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 15:16).

And Peter too understood that we as God’s priests must show forth God’s praises in a darkened world: “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” (1 Pet. 2:9). As we show His praises as His priests, others are called out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

In Exodus 29 we read about the ordinance the Lord designed to consecrate Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. The Hebrew idea of *consecration* in this passage is *to fill the hand* with some awesome responsibility (v. 29). The weight of this responsibility was equal to the need of God’s people for the tabernacle of the congregation and the ministry of the holy place (v. 30). As God’s New Testament priesthood, we have our hands filled with a weighty responsibility that includes equally eternal consequence, the need for God’s people for their tabernacle and holy place, their local church assemblies.

In this chapter, we have seen that this consecration that fills hands with responsibility begins with the priests being brought near (vv. 1-9) and then they are qualified for the priesthood through sacrifice (vv. 10-28). We have seen parallels to our own ministry as God’s priests today.

This morning we are focused on that part of these instructions, which highlights the importance of succession when it comes to executing the office of the priest (vv. 29-37). Finally, the chapter will speak of a priest’s ministry in the abiding presence of the Lord and His dwelling place (vv. 38-46).

The author of Hebrews may have been thinking of this chapter when he wrote in chapter 10 about what it means for us as New Testament believers to have a Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, over the house of God. It means we must draw near in full assurance of faith (v. 22), as Aaron and his sons were brought near in our chapter. It means we must hold fast the confession of our faith in the blood of Christ without wavering, for He is faithful who promised (v. 23), just like Aaron and his sons became fully qualified through the bloodshed of sacrifice designed by God in this chapter.

And it means that we must consider one another to provoke unto love and good works (v. 24), which is the concern of the rest of Exodus 29, including caring for our successors as God's priests in our passage today. Understand with me three things about our successors as God's priests this morning.

I. Our successors must be blessings from God (vv. 29-30).

Illustration: To see someone follow in your footsteps can be a rewarding experience. Last Thursday evening I was at our town recreation basketball coaches meeting. After the meeting, one of the coaches whose son is on his 3/4th grade team came over and asked if I remembered him. He looked different with his beard, but he was one of the young men I coached years ago. We shared some memories, and riding home I enjoyed the feeling of what it is like to have someone follow in my footsteps as a basketball coach for our town.

Application: The day Aaron first put into practice the instruction of this chapter about his successor must have been a very rewarding day. But unlike coaching basketball, the work of the priesthood meant that Aaron could be succeeded only by one of his sons. His successor had to be born into his family, and Aaron would have known that this miracle of new life is a gift that God Himself must give. His successors had to be blessings from God.

Ps. 127:3-5 tells us this is true about all our naturally born children: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Aaron's successors were the fruit of his wife's womb, and so blessings from God.

Illustration: I saw a billboard in Pembroke as I was taking my car to the repair shop this past week which said, "Real men love babies." It was a pro-life message, which recognized that too many abortions happen because fathers are not real men who understand that the fruit of the womb is God's reward, and that their mothers must be truly loved in the covenantal bonds of holy matrimony.

Aaron understood this truth about his children, and as God's priests we must understand the same is true about our spiritual offspring, our sons and daughters in the faith. Real men love babies, and real Christians love new believers. Real Christians long to reproduce, but in that longing we must always remember who it is that can accomplish this miracle of new life in someone's heart.

Just as Luke reported in Acts 2:17 about the faithful witness and growth of the first local church, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved," as God's priests, we must ask Him for our successors, for our sons and daughters in the faith to be added to our church to carry on the work of the Lord here after us. When they are added, the Lord shall be the one who has done it, and we must be ready to give Him all the glory and praise. Our successors must be given by God.

II. Our successors must be nourished by God (vv. 31-35).

Illustration: Friday, I lit the firepit to burn some sticks with the help of some gasoline and a match. When I threw the match

on the gasoline, the flame exploded and leaped high into the air. But once the gas was burned up, the sticks did not provide the fire with much fuel, so the flame quickly died out. A couple of solid logs would have helped to keep the fire fed.

Application: In our passage, the Lord designs seven days of activities to prepare Aaron's successors. The symbolism of seven days in the Old Testament is an echo of the completeness of the work of the creation week of Genesis 1-2. These seven days of consecration are filled with symbols that inform us about the work Aaron's successors would complete throughout their days.

These verses describe a meal, which would nourish the successors of Aaron for their work. They ate the ram of the consecration and the bread of the basket at the entrance of the tabernacle, both symbols of our Savior as we have already seen in our study. They ate this meal new every day (v. 34)..

And so the daily nourishment of God's priesthood is the person and work of Jesus Christ himself. Just as Aaron's successor had to find a holy place in which to cook his nourishing meal (v. 31), so our successors must learn from us the importance of their finding their holy time and place to nourish themselves on their Savior.

Jesus illustrated our need for His nourishment with a vine and its branches. He told us that to abide in Him, nourished like a branch from its vine, is to abide in His words (John 15:7), so we must have daily times with our Bibles open.

He taught us in the same verse that abiding in Him for nourishment also requires prayer ("ye shall ask what ye will, and it will be done for you"), and so we must have daily times nourished with Him in prayer. God's priests cannot do their work without this nourishment, this abiding in the Vine. Jesus said, "Without Me, ye can do nothing" (v. 5).

And in another passage He spoke about our nourishment to teach us that we have much to do as God's priests. He taught that we must eat the food he had to eat (John 4:32-34), which his disciples at first knew nothing about, that is to do the will of the Father who sent Him and to finish His work. As God's priests, this must be the desire we have taught our successors to cultivate every day.

To teach them, we must cultivate it in ourselves first, of course. You will notice from our passage that Aaron partook along with his successor in this nourishment. How shall we encourage those who come after us to be nourished on Jesus Christ as a daily discipline and to eat the food of accomplishing His will if we do not partake in that discipline ourselves as an example and encouragement to them? Our successors must be nourished by God in Christ, and so must we.

The stranger knows nothing about what this holy privilege is like (v. 33b). You and I were once strangers. We knew what it was like to have no access to the privileges of the open book and the bent knee. Why would we live another day in the misery of that condition dominated by our flesh? We are God's priests, no longer strangers, and we must be nourished by our God in our holy time and place, so that we can do His will each day.

III. Our successors must touch God's altar (vv. 36-37).

Illustration: There are only a few things in life that we do every day. Here in our country, most people shower every day. When I traveled in Europe years ago, I learned that Europeans did not do that. They showered less often.

Application: As we read about the atoning sacrifice of the young bull directing the attention of the priesthood to the altar of sacrifice, we are reading about something that was to happen every day (v. 36). The daily sacrifice sanctified the

altar, which in its own right becomes a holy of holies (v. 37), because the One represented by the young bull who died there is the One who dwelt behind the veil, where the holy of holies was. To touch this altar, then, is to become holy.

The New Testament parallel to the altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle, called the holy of holies in this consecration ceremony, is the cruel cross of Calvary. There Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Jehovah who became a man, died to atone for our sins.

Jesus made clear that we cannot be His disciples without touching the cross: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). To take up the cross is to touch the altar, to be set apart as holy for the holy work of every day.

The Apostle Paul called this presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to serve the Lord (Rom. 12:1). It is in this sense that he explained, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). God's priest touches this altar daily when they bend the knee in the early morning hours and give their bodies over to their Lord for that day.

Again, our successors must touch the altar of the cross in this way. Every day, they must take it up and follow Christ to Calvary, dying to self, and presenting their body to their Lord to make whatever sacrifices serving Him well might require on that day. Will we have successors who do so if we are unwilling to do so? Our successors must touch God's altar, take up the cross, and so must we.

Conclusion: Are you God's priest? Have you repented of your unbelief and found forgiveness for your sins by faith in Jesus Christ? If not, this morning you must count the cost and make the decision. Will you take up your cross and follow Him by faith as your Lord and Savior? When you do, you will become one of the living stones of God's spiritual house, a holy priest who can make offerings acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

If you are God's priest, who is your successor? Who is your son or daughter in the faith? Who has the Lord added to the church in answer to your prayers? Have we no successor and content for it to be so? The priesthood of Aaron would have never been content without sons of Aaron to carry on the work. Nor should we, the Savior's New Testament priesthood.

God must give our successors to us, and we must remind them to glorify God for what He has done in their lives, now clothed in the garments of the priesthood, the righteous robes of Christ. God must nourish our successors, through daily fellowship with Him, feeding on the Bread of Life and consuming the food of accomplishing His will. We must partake in this nourishment with them. And God must remind them to touch the altar daily, to take up the cross and follow their Savior to Calvary. They will be encouraged to live sacrificially for Him when we do so.

“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