

THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Exodus 28:1 - 29.46

Key verse 28: 29

"Whenever Aaron enters the holy place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord."

Thank the Lord for the blessed study of the Exodus Bible. It is an unimaginable grace that the holy God has humbled himself so much to dwell among us, the dirty sinners. Actually, we only deserved God's punishment and eternal separation. But through the wonderful grace of Jesus, God even welcomed us as His own people, His children, and established a personal love relationship with us. Now we can always come to Jesus through repentance and faith and see His glory and build the dwelling of God among students by the obedience of faith through one-to-one Bible study. We thank God that through the Josia Bible Seminary we were able to build a dwelling of God where young people could hear God's Word and form one-to-one teams with them.

This week, our young people and children received their semi-annual report cards. Some were very happy, but others were not so happy. Those who have a good report card should continue their efforts. Those who have worsened may repent and restart in the second half of the year. Regardless of our performance, it is the grace of God that we may come to God through repentance and live as His holy people.

Today we want to reflect on the holy priesthood and the meaning of the holy garments of priests. God chose Aaron and after him his family by one-sided grace as his priest and gave him the task to stand before him and offer the sacrifices of the Israelites. In this way, we may learn to fulfill our task as God's royal priesthood with the right attitude and to bring prayer for the spiritual resurrection of the students persistently to God. We are called to live as shepherds and Bible teachers for our people, for the students in Europe, even for the Muslim world. Let us bear the names of our sheep on our hearts so that God may remember them and awaken them spiritually as His people.

1. The Priestly Garments (28:1-43)

Look at verse 1: „Have Aaron your brother brought to you from the Israelites, with his sons Andab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so that they may serve me as priests.“ God chose Aaron and his sons as God's priests. Priests are the mediators between God and man. They received the sacred task of offering the sacrifices of the Israelites and interceding for them. Through them, the Israelites were allowed to approach God and live as God's people. This calling was the one-sided and sovereign election of God. Aaron was not better or more hopeful than the other Israelites, but came from among them. He was a sinner just like everyone else. In chapter 32 we learn that he was spineless and made the golden calf, thus supporting the sinful desires of the Israelites. God knew Aaron. Yet God chose Aaron as his priest. In other words, the election has nothing to do with our achievement or with the fact that we were somehow better than the others. God chooses the weak and low to sanctify them and use them as His holy priests for His eternal work of salvation.

God also chose us from among our people without merit by first giving us His grace. Through Bible study, we were allowed to meet Jesus and hear God's calling to be used as a kingdom

of priests and as a holy people by God. As priests of God, we have the task of praying for our bearers of hope and for our people and proclaiming to them God's Word, His blessings (1 Peter 2:9). This precious task of God is given not only to the first generation, but also to the second and subsequent generations. In fact, in the New Testament there is no hereditary priesthood any more, but it is open to all who have personally accepted the grace of Jesus. God in his sovereignty has chosen our next generation since childhood and has prepared and trained them through the faith of their parents so that they can grow as global spiritual leaders and fulfill the priestly task of God in this generation.

God's calling is His one-sided and undeserved sovereign grace that mobilizes and obliges us to fulfill God's task in holy reverence. Paul said in 1 Cor 15:10, "But by God's grace I am what I am. And His grace in me was not in vain, but I have worked much more than all of them; but not I, but the grace of God which is with me." Paul always remembered God's grace and fulfilled God's task all the more diligently. In the same way we may also recognize that we are called and chosen by God's grace alone and that we pray all the more diligently for the students and serve them through one-to-one Bible study and are thus needed for their spiritual resurrection.

God chose me among the students. I was just one of many computer people who was more selfish than the others because I didn't even care about a friend who almost died of anorexia. But in his one-sided grace, God found me at the beginning of my studies and chose and called me to be a shepherd and Bible teacher for the students, to lead them back to him through 1:1 Bible study. So I was allowed to be used as a mediator for my brothers and sisters and for some students. God called me to serve him as a Bible teacher for all mathematicians and scientists and to build the holy vessel of prayer for them, as 1 Peter 2:9 says: „But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.“

Let us see verse 2: „Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor.“ It was God's will that Aaron should do his duty in particularly beautiful and glorious garments. These garments would reflect God's glory to a certain extent. He did not get these garments because he was better, but because of God's grace and mission. These holy garments that God prepared for Aaron refer to the righteousness of God that comes from God himself. Even today, God calls weak and defective people and cloths them with his righteousness. Ephesians 4:24 says: „And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness!“ When we receive Jesus, we are clothed in the garments of the righteousness of God. That is why we should lead a different life. God has separated us for his mission. Jesus even said in the parable that those who did not put on wedding garments were not allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Then how can we live a separate life? In our time we see that the lives of many Christians are hardly different from those of unbelievers. They go to church from time to time, but otherwise they live the same self-centered life as others. God wants us to put on his holy garments of righteousness every day and live the new God-centered life as shepherds and Bible teachers for the students on campus.

M. Peter came to Germany as a student and had to struggle with the language problem. But he did not lead an ordinary self-centered life, but a holy life of mission, obeying Mark 11:22. He prepared a Sunday message every week and delivered it. He also invited young students to common life, living with his family in the basement room. He created the environment so that they could grow as disciples of Jesus. This teaches us how to put on the holy garments of a God-centered life.

Let us see verse 3: „Tell all the skilled workers to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest.“ God himself had called Bezalel and Oholiab and had given them wisdom to make everything according to God's plan. Doing God's work is often challenging, but it is God himself who fills his people with the spirit of wisdom to do his work.

In the following verses, God gives precise instructions on how to make the individual garments: A breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash are described in detail. They used fine linen, gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, the same materials and colors that were used to make the sanctuary itself. So the priests would reflect the glory of God in their garments.

Let us see the stones. Two onyx stones were to be attached to the shoulders of the ephod, on each of which 6 names of the sons of Israel were engraved (9). So the priest was the representative of the people of Israel and went into the sanctuary on behalf of all the tribes. He should not criticize or reprimand the people, but rather carry them as the good shepherd carries his sheep on his shoulders. This is also our precious and important task before God, that we carry God's people no matter what their spiritual condition may be. Verse 12b says: „Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord.“

The breastpiece was a 20 cm square piece which was attached to the ephod with gold chains and carried by the priest on the breast. In this bag were the Urim and the Thummim with which the priest could ask God's decision. This breastpiece was decorated with 12 precious stones. Let us read verse 17 to 20: „17 Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. The first row shall be carnelian, chrysolite and beryl; 18 the second row shall be turquoise, lapis lazuli and emerald; 19 the third row shall be jacinth, agate and amethyst; 20 the fourth row shall be topaz, onyx and jasper.2 Mount them in gold filigree settings.“ On each of these stones, the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel was engraved. So the priest carried the names of the Israelites on his heart. Let us read verse 29: „Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord.“ The breastpiece was especially connected with decision-making, that is, with God's direction for the Israelites. Aaron was to carry all this on his heart in prayer.

Jesus is our high priest, who is constantly praying for us and has opened the way into the Sanctuary for us. Jesus especially carried his 12 disciples always on his heart and prayed for them and eventually made them apostles for world mission. Jesus still constantly prays for us before the throne of God. We can also carry the names of our entrusted sheep in prayer before God. God wants to remember them and work mightily in them. Because H. Jochen constantly carries the names of his sheep before God, God worked in Olaf, so last month he finished his Master's thesis and thanked God for it. From the early morning prayer on let us carry the names of our sheep on our hearts before God and pray for spiritual revival.

The fact that every stone was different teaches us, that our sheep are very different and diverse and in its own way unique and beautiful for God. God looked at every Israelite tribe as an individual diamond. The same way Jesus saw and served his disciples whether it was Peter, Thomas Bartholomäus. Lets look at our sheep with this kind of hope and come to God for them in prayer.

Verse 29 says: „Whenever Aaron enters the holy place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord.“ God wants us to have the name of our sheep on our hearts no matter what situation

they are in right now. Instead of only thinking about ourselves we can spend more time in prayer for others.

The little bells were very important, so you could hear the priest when he was serving in the tabernacle. This way the people outside could participate in prayer. The front leaf said: „Holy to the Lord“. It is interesting that Aaron was to bear the sin that were attached to the sacrifices.

Lets read verses 42 and 43: „Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the tent of meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die. “This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants.“ For many young people their clothes are very important because they represent their personality in some way. These verses teach us that we should not come to God with unholy clothes. We should prepare the right environment for our worship service, in which we can focus on and hear God’s word.

2. The ordination of the priests (29,1-46)

Chapter 29 is about the ordination of the priests. It was divided into three parts: First, Aaron and his sons were washed (4), then they put on their priest clothing (5-6) and then they were anointed (7). Nobody can be a priest without preparation. We need preparation too: 1.) Repentance and sanctification, by confessing our sins to god. 2.) Sanctification and putting on a new identity. 3.) Accepting God’s calling. Without repentance, sanctification and calling nobody can be used by God.

After this preparation, there were a number of prescribed sacrifices. The bull was offered as a sin offering. The bull’s blood was mainly used by spilling it for the forgiveness of sins, while the rest was burned outside the camp. Jesus shed his blood for us, because without blood there is no forgiveness. The second sacrifice was a ram, that was completely burned as a fire offering on the altar. It symbolizes the complete sacrifice of the life of the priest. Romas 12:1 says “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Finally, the third sacrifice was a ram whose fat was burned, but whose other parts where eaten by the priests. Because Jesus gave his life as a ransom sacrifice for us, we cannot just continue living as before, but lead a God-centric life as God’s called ones.

Verses 38 to 41 describe the daily offerings of the Israelites, namely a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening. 730 sheep in a year is a costly affair. These offerings show us, that the relationship with God is not a given. Some want to cultivate their relationship to God “only when necessary”, e.g. when they are doing badly and they feel in need for help. But God wishes to have a permanent relationship to us. He wants to live among us every day and that we also come to him every day and nurture the relationship to him. The priests, in particular, bore a sacred responsibility, namely to come to God twice a day, to bring the sacrifice to God regularly. It is not enough that we are saved once and then live on as we did before. Especially those who have been called by God should come to Jesus twice a day, repent, renew their devotion and decide to obey his word. It is very encouraging that many coworkers among our young generation participate in early morning prayer and daily bread bible study. They their relationship to God on a daily basis by reflecting on God’s word day and night, while offering prayers for Europe.

Look at verses 45 and 46: „Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God. “ The goal of the priesthood is for God to dwell

among his people. Where God's called people persistently pray to God and bring their offerings to the Lord, a powerful work of God happens.

Herrnhut is a small town in Saxony. When the faithful there began their priestly task and formed a prayer chain in the 18th century, God worked mightily in them and through them. Within 40 years, more than 300 lay missionaries were sent to 28 mission areas. Thus, the community grew all over the world, so that today it includes more than 1 million believers.

God has called us as holy priests to serve him and come before God for the young people, to bear their names before the Lord. Because we persistently pray for them, students have hope of being spiritually awakened and used as a royal priesthood for this generation, praying for the whole world and carrying the whole world on their shoulders and in their hearts. Let us fulfill God's priestly task with holy fear and responsibility by carrying 12 sheep in our hearts and praying for them. May God use us to carry all the universities and faculties in Europa on our hearts, to set up 100.000 bible teachers and 5 million prayer servants and to prepare for the spiritual reawakening in Europe.