

Clothed in Christ

Exodus 27:20-28:14

Thus far God has described the furniture of the tabernacle that serves and symbolize His people, drawing them close to Him. Service at the tabernacle is performed primarily by priests who are clothed in holiness, adorned with glory and beauty. As the true high priest, Jesus Christ brought us to the Father, and today the church is God's royal priesthood, clothed in Christ.

Overview of the Text

Moses is to command Israel to bring pure olive oil for light so the lampstand will burn continually (v20). It's not supposed to go out, at least not at night when Aaron and his sons tend it continually, evening to morning before Yahweh, on behalf of Israel as long as the tabernacle stands (vv21-22). Aaron and his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar minister as priests to God (v1). Aaron the high priest will wear holy garments that are glorious and beautiful, crafted by those who are filled with the Spirit of wisdom (vv2-3). The Spirit consecrates Aaron through the garments so he may minister to God, and these include: a breastplate, ephod, robe, woven tunic, turban, and sash (v4). The ephod covers the body like a long apron made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet wool, and fine linen (vv5-6). Shoulder straps connect the front and the back, and a fine sash cinches the middle (vv7-8). Two onyx stones engraved with the names of the sons of Israel in settings of gold are placed on the shoulders as a memorial before Yahweh (vv9-12). Two golden chains hung down apparently to hold the breastplate (vv13-14).

Eternal Light

It's curious that the oil wasn't described back in chapter 25 along with the lampstand, and perhaps it's because the focus now is on priestly service. The first thing God says in creation is "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, so the lampstand must burn continually through the night. It symbolizes His watchful presence, which is why we look to the Lord for help in time of need: "Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). God is up all night watching you and yours so you don't have to be. In fact, it's worthless to get up early and go to bed late in anxious toil; "for He gives His beloved sleep" (Ps. 127:2). The tabernacle graveyard shift is striking reminder of this (Ps. 134:1-2). If you can't stop working at night, you've forgotten that God builds the house. If you can't take the Sabbath off, you are the petty idol of your business. Moses makes this point while simultaneously delivering the command to bring pure, lightly beaten olive oil. God's people are His light shining continually (cf. Lk. 12:35).

Arrayed in Holiness, Glory, & Beauty

Clothing indicates office or position. Whether you are a nurse, doctor, police officer, judge, lawyer, businessman, delivery guy or cashier at Chick-fil-A, your uniform tells what you do. So it is with the priests, Aaron and sons (v1). Clothing

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also covers the shame of our nakedness, which we've had since the fall, and protects us our surroundings (Gen. 3:10). But clothing is also for glory and beauty. The priestly garments are holy: set apart, dedicated to God, symbolic of the faithful worshiper. The linen undergarments are white indicating cleansing and holiness (v42), and then the out garments are bright with colors for glory and beauty (v2). Just as the whole tabernacle is made with beautiful design, materials, and craftsmanship, so are the priestly garments. The Spirit of wisdom fills the people who make them so Aaron can minister to God (v3). It's the Holy Spirit who makes holy *and beautiful* garments. True holiness that beholds the majestic God of Scripture is not blind to beauty. But notice that God called His people to holiness first. He doesn't build a stunning tabernacle and then tell everyone to repent. He calls them into relationship first, gives them the law, and then adds glory and beauty. Get your heart right before you get your hair right. But once your heart is right, feel free to take a shower and wash your hair. Aaron dresses to minister to God, but as we've seen our lives are lived on the altar before God (Rom. 12:1). Our clothing is either an act of love for Him and our neighbor, or an offense to Him and disregard for our neighbor. While we're never to judge a poor man or show favoritism (Jms. 2:1-4), we can judge ourselves and dress to worship the Lord, honor our parents, love our neighbors and so on.

Riding on His Shoulders

Aaron is a walking tabernacle, covered in gold, blue, purple, scarlet and fine linen (vv5-6). The gold is heavy and glorious, and he's decked out almost from head to toe, only lacking shoes because he is on holy ground. He carries the onyx stones with the names of Israel's sons to remind God of His promises to them. This is like the rainbow that God set in the clouds to remind Him of His covenant with the earth (Gen. 9:13-15). Except the high priest bears these names personally before Yahweh (v12). This is what it means to be a priest, representing God's people to Him, interceding and praying for them. God's doesn't need reminding, but we do, and He uses our prayers to do His will on earth. The primary new covenant parallel of the old covenant Aaronic priesthood is not pastoral clergy. It's the whole priestly church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:19).

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Where the Aaronic priesthood failed, Jesus was faithful. He served the Father with true holiness, and though despised and rejected, was crowned with glory and honor. What's beyond reckoning about Jesus is that not only did He take our unfaithfulness upon Himself, He then bestows Himself upon us: "and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:23-24).