

JESUS CHRIST: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

28 Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the children of Israel, along with his sons, so that he may serve me as a priest—Aaron and his sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 2You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, to give him glory and beauty. 3Instruct all the skilled men, whom I have endowed with an abundance of artistic talent, to make garments for Aaron in order to sanctify him, so that he may serve me as a priest. 4These are the garments they shall make: a breastplate and an ephod and a robe and a woven tunic and a turban and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron and his sons, so that he may serve me as a priest. 5They shall use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen. (Ex. 28:1-5)

Introduction

When James Zozzaro entered the ministry, becoming an ordained minister of the gospel, he had some explaining to do. He had to explain to his family why he was not being ordained as a priest. After all, he was baptized as a Roman Catholic and he received his first holy communion in the Roman Catholic Church. Having been born and raised in the Roman Catholic Church, it was assumed that if James were to pursue a full-time Christian vocation he would enter the priesthood. In an effort to answer the questions raised by his family and relatives, James addressed to them this letter on the occasion of his ordination:

To My Beloved Family,

Many of you may be wondering why I am being ordained today as a minister, rather than as a Roman Catholic priest. This is a fair question.

In order to understand why I have not sought ordination as a priest, you must first know what a priest does. The Catholic Church teaches, "The chief powers of the Priest are to be able to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to forgive sin" (*Outline of the Catholic Faith*, p.13).

The first problem with this is that the Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus offered Himself once as a sacrifice for sin. If this is true, then the sacrifice of the Mass is a false sacrifice.

The second problem is that the Bible clearly teaches that only God can forgive sins. If this is true, then my forgiving the sins of the people in a confessional will do them no good

My desire is not to offend, but to explain. I hope you all can respect my decision, as I must please God rather than people, even family whom I love. (*New Horizons*, March, 1996, p.3)

James Zozzaro had come to recognize that the one true priest provided for us by God Himself is the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Scriptures declare, *“there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim. 2:5.)

In the Old Testament era God ordained the priesthood of Aaron and his sons to represent the people in their service to God and to be the ministers of God’s grace to them. But the New Testament teaches us that the Old Testament ministry of Aaron and his sons, being a type of the coming ministry of Christ, has been fulfilled and superseded by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹²He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb. 9:11-12)

Let us now consider the Old Testament priestly ministry as the model that illustrates for us the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

I. Trust Christ to Represent You before God, Because He has been Consecrated by God

In chapter 29 the LORD instructs Moses as to what he is to do to Aaron and his sons in order to consecrate them to minister to Him in the priest’s office. There are described in that chapter the various acts by which Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the priesthood.

First, Aaron and his sons were brought before the door of the tent of meeting and were washed with water (Ex. 29:4.) This ceremonial washing symbolized their purification from sin and for service to the LORD who is holy. Even though He is sinless, our Lord Jesus was “washed” through His baptism. He submitted to baptism to show His obedience to His Father and His identification with us, since the act of receiving baptism was a sacrament representing the washing away of sin, note Matthew 3:5-6, 13-15,

People went out to [John the Baptist] from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ... ¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. (Matt. 3:5-6,13-15)

Second, Aaron were clothed with the sacred garments prepared for the high priest (Ex. 29:5-6.) Aaron is dressed in the coat, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastplate, and the mitre (or turban) is then placed upon his head. The priestly garments represent 1) the glory and the splendor of the priesthood,

especially depicted by the robes: *“You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, [to give him] glory and beauty”* (Ex.28:2); 2) the ministry of the priesthood, especially depicted by the ephod and the breastplate, (which will be discussed below under point II); and 3) the spiritual authority of the priesthood, especially depicted by the crown-like mitre, or turban. The divine realities of these sacred garments are seen in our Lord’s resurrection, ascension, and position at the right hand of God the Father from where today He carries on His high priestly ministry for His church collectively and for each individual believer personally.

Third, Aaron was anointed with the holy anointing oil (Ex. 29:7.) The anointing with the holy oil symbolized the priest being anointed with the Holy Spirit in order to carry out his divinely ordained ministry. Our Lord Jesus was so anointed at the time of His baptism:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. (Matt. 3:16)

At the outset of His public ministry, the Lord Jesus applied to Himself the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2,

The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed; ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor. (Lk. 4:18-19)

Fourth, Exodus 29:10-27 describe the sacrifices that were offered on behalf of Aaron and his relationship to those sacrifices. The bull was sacrificed as a sin offering on behalf of Aaron (vs. 10-14,) and the offering of two rams symbolized Aaron’s dedication to the LORD and to his priestly ministry. Our Lord Jesus presented His own body on the cross of Calvary as the one true sin offering for us and the supreme offering of dedication to God His Father:

... when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.’ ⁷Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’... ¹⁰And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb.10:5-7,10)

According to Exodus 29:22-28, a portion of the sacrificial ram and the bread were placed upon Aaron’s hands and then waved before the LORD, another portion was waved before the LORD and presented to Aaron as his portion. This symbolized the rewards of the priesthood: Aaron, for his service, receives a reward from the

LORD. The reward that the Lord Jesus receives is the satisfaction of seeing His work bear fruit,

Yet it was Jehovah's will to crush him, he caused him to suffer. Even though you have made his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring; his days shall continue, and Jehovah's purpose shall be accomplished by his hand. ¹¹He will see the fruit of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant shall justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore, I will give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors—he bore the sins of many and interceded for the transgressors. (Isa.53:10-12)

“The fruit of the travail of his soul” consists of the receiving His redeemed people as His holy possession: “[He] *gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:14.)

The significance of Exodus 29 is the fact that Aaron is appointed and consecrated by God to serve in the capacity of priest—Aaron does not assume the role of priest by his own accord. Consider the fate of Korah, when he sought to acquire the priesthood by himself: *“the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, as well as all Korah's followers and all their possessions. ³³So it was that they, and all who were aligned with them, went down alive into Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they disappeared from the midst of the assembly”* (Num. 16:32-33.)

Trust Christ to represent you before God, because He has been consecrated by God to be our one and only great High Priest:

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ... ⁴No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” (Heb. 5:1,4-5)

II. Trust Christ to Represent You before God, Because He is Compassionate and Holy

The garments of the high priest are intended to reveal his work and his character, (the individual items are listed in verse 4 of Exodus 28 and described in the remainder of the chapter.)

Verses 6-14 describe *“the ephod.”* The ephod was a type of vest, perhaps reaching no lower than the waist, joined only at the shoulders; its main function

was to carry the memorial stones and the breastplate. On top of each shoulder piece of the ephod was set an onyx stone, (a precious gem stone often pale blue in color.) Upon the two onyx stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, (six names on each stone,) and the stones were encased in gold settings. Verse 12 indicates that the two stones were to be *“memorial stones for the sons of Israel,”* Aaron was to *“bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before Jehovah.”*

What is the spiritual significance of the engraved stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod worn by the high priest? The high priest appeared before the LORD representing in his own person all the LORD’s people who are precious to Him, and bearing them before the LORD in intercession. Consider the high priestly intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ: *“Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence”* (Heb. 9:24.)

Verses 15-30 describe *“the breastplate.”* The breastplate of (covenant) rights was a nine inch by eighteen inch piece of material folded over to form a nine inch by nine inch square pouch attached to the ephod. Note: Whereas the NIV translates this item, *“a breast piece for making decisions,”* and the ASV gives the translation, *“a breastplate of judgment,”* a better translation would seem to be, *“a breastplate of [covenantal] rights.”* The Hebrew word, **בְּשֵׁטֶט**, often translated “judgment,” also has the meaning, “rights,” which seems to be the sense of the word in this passage.

Four rows of precious gemstones (each stone different from the others,) were fastened to the breastplate in a gold setting. *“The Urim and Thummim,”* (literally; *“the Lights and the Perfections,”*) were placed inside the breastplate. As is explained in Numbers 27:21, *“the Urim and Thummim”* were used as instruments of revelation to discern the mind of God. According to verse 29; Aaron *“will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastplate of [covenantal] rights as a continuing memorial before Jehovah.”*

What is the spiritual significance of the breastplate of (covenant) rights? The people of God are precious to their high priest, (they are next to his heart), and he “reminds” the LORD that they are precious to Him and have covenantal rights before Him. Each individual believer is precious to Jesus, our Great High Priest, and to our heavenly Father, (as seen by each individual tribe being represented by a unique gem stone.) So much so, that they are willing to share their heart with us, (as seen by the breastplate being worn over the high priest’s heart,) and receive us into their most intimate divine fellowship, (as seen by the pouch of the breastplate containing the Urim and Thummim, the articles of revelation.) Note John 15:13-15 and John 14:20,

No one has any greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends, if you do the things I command you. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (Jn.15:13-15)

On that day [the day of Christ's final revelation when He returns in glory] *you will know* [by personal and intimate experience] *that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.* (Jn. 14:20.) Here is the most intimate fellowship and union the believer individually, and the church corporately, have with the Lord Jesus and His Father.

Verses 31-35 describe the high priestly robe. Immediately under the ephod Aaron was to wear the high priest's robe; woven of blue cloth, without a seam it was sleeveless, having only a hole for the head. Attached to the bottom edge of the robe were blue, purple and scarlet pomegranates, alternating with golden bells.

What is the spiritual significance of the high priestly robe? The seamless robe represented the integrity, (the undivided devotion of heart to God,) that the LORD requires for one to approach His holy throne. The pomegranates represented a life that is fruitful and well-pleasing to God. The sound of the bells, heralding both the high priest's approach to the LORD and his return, would indicate to the people that he and his offering on their behalf were acceptable to the LORD. The sounding of the bells indicated that the high priest had not been consumed by the LORD's holy presence. Note Psalm 24:3-4 and its relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, in that Psalm the question is asked, ***"Who may ascend the hill of Jehovah? Who may stand in his holy place?"*** In light of that question, note Jesus' testimony made to Mary following His resurrection, ***"Then Jesus said to her, 'Do not touch me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God'"*** (Jn. 20:17.)

Verses 36-38 describe the high priest's ***"mitre,"*** (or, turban.) The mitre, or turban, was made of white linen. Attached to the turban by a blue cord was a small plate of pure gold with the inscription ***"Holy to Jehovah."*** The small gold plate, attached to the bottom edge of the mitre, was positioned across Aaron's forehead. Aaron was to always wear this turban with the engraved gold plate, so that he may bear ***"the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate ... so that they may be acceptable to Jehovah"*** (vs. 38.)

What is the spiritual significance of the turban and the engraved gold plate? In his representative capacity (i.e.; his being an Old Testament model of the coming Messiah,) the high priest, as the Holy One of God, is able to provide forgiveness and acceptance with God for the LORD's people. With regard to the New Testament fulfillment of this ministry in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, note

Colossians 1:13-14, “[God] *has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*”

Trust Christ to represent you before God, because He is both compassionate and holy:

... surely it is not angels Christ helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. (Heb.2:16-17)

... we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Heb. 4:15)

III. Thrust Christ to Represent You before God, Because His Work is Perfect

Each morning and again each evening the priest would have to offer the sacrifice of a lamb as a burnt offering unto the LORD. Once a year he would have to offer the annual sin-offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15.) Throughout his career as high priest Aaron would have to continually offer the same animal sacrifices to the LORD on behalf of the people. This same high priestly ministry would have to be carried on by his sons after him; Exodus 29:29-30 specifies that the holy garments made for Aaron “*shall belong to his descendants*” ... *The son who succeeds him as priest ... is to wear them.*”

In contrast to this repeated offering of countless animal sacrifices, we read this of the high priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb.10:11-12)

Trust Christ to represent you before God, because His work is perfect. Our Lord triumphantly cried out upon the cross, “*It is finished!*” (Jn. 19:30.) In Matthew 27:50-51 we read, “*when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” The tearing of the curtain, which separated the Holy of holies from the rest of the sanctuary, indicated that, by virtue of the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus, the way is now made open to God through Christ.

Conclusion

James Zozzaro came to recognize that the one true priest provided for us by God Himself is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He is the great High Priest provided by God, we must trust in Christ alone to represent us before God.