

# The Priestly Robes

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now as we look at this 28th chapter in Exodus, as you will have gathered, it is dealing with the priestly garments prepared at God's direction for Aaron in the first instance and thereafter in successive generations for his sons and for the descendants of Aaron all the way down through to the high priests, albeit the disreputable ones of Jesus' own day.

And eventually of course with the destruction of the temple in Jesus' day that the high priesthood simply ceased as did the ornery priesthood. It's one of the tragedies, if you like, of the history of Christendom that we see throughout the history of the Christian church that from its gospel and apostolic simplicity with the passing of the centuries into the dark ages, you see the church seeking almost to restore again this kind of priestly robes and beauty and gold and all these outward things to almost turn the clock back to the pre-gospel priesthood and to make it almost again a sacrificial sort of priesthood.

And of course that was one of the reasons that we needed reformation in the 16th century and the gospel simplicity to be restored. But in the original context in which God gives these things, they are right and they are good and they are ordained of God before they become surpassed by the fulfillment in Christ.

These things which are given, these priestly garments and the details of them are like so much else in the Old Testament scriptures, pointing us to Christ. Pointing us to the one mediator between God and man.

And we see here the preciousness of the goods, the materials that are to be used. It is the very best of everything. We'll come to that in a minute. We see the precious stones. We see the precious people of God inscribed upon these stones.

[ 2 : 02 ] We see the work of labor and of love in the priesthood. And we see the priestly protection of the individuals as they enter into the Holy of Holies there.

So first of all, then we look at the materials, the goods which are going, the precious goods which are used to compile these priestly garments. Take gold and blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen, fine twined linen, flaxen thread that has been twined to the very finest and most specific of the best of the best that is to be used for these precious garments.

Gold, now gold, ironically, it's one of these metals which it's been identified, you know, by studying it. It's not actually the most precious in the sense of the most rare metal or element in the world.

There are others that are far more rare, you know, like platinum and others and so on. It's not the most hard or the most utility. Iron is far more useful in that sense and was at one stage more precious to ancient societies than gold.

But what has made gold throughout the world this sort of standard precious element which is valued by all cultures around the world?

[ 3 : 25 ] And it is written that it's not simply its durability and its hardness and ability to endure fire and so on, but it is partly, quite literally, its color. That this yellow shine that reflects the light of the sun is partly what makes it so special, so precious to all different cultures and all different tribes and nations around the world.

And so, to all of them, gold is considered one of the most precious things of all. Although, as we say, there are elements, there are metals which are both more rare and more useful.

Gold has this unique sort of quality to kind of dazzle and impress. And because it is regarded as being so precious, there is gold to be used here that reflects, as it were, that lights up with the light of the sun, dazzles in the light.

And this is partly to reflect the glory of God. The sun, of course, is often depicted as that which epitomizes, which paints a picture of the power, the love, the warmth, the life-giving ability of God.

And sometimes, of course, we might be likened to the moon, which in and of itself has no life in itself. It's just lunar dust. But it can, at its best, reflect the light of the sun.

[ 4 : 44 ] And we, likewise, should be shining back out into the world the light of God's love. Gold, in a sense, does this. Blue is used almost certainly because it is taken as being the color that epitomizes heaven.

The vault of heaven, the blue sky above, and therefore a symptom of the heavenly realm. Remember that the high priest is to enter into the Holy of Holies to do business with the God of heaven and earth.

And blue symbolizes the heavens. Purple was that which was the most precious and rare coloring and dye of all.

Some of you will be aware that purple was obtained, purple dye is obtainable from a particular shellfish. From which, when you open the shellfish, you can squeeze out, as it were, a little drop of the juice within.

This purple dye within one drop from each shellfish in question. And so it's very, very rare. And it's very, very expensive. And it's very difficult to obtain enough of this one drop at a time precious dye to actually make anything.

[ 6 : 00 ] So only the richest, only royalty, kings, and perhaps high priests in particular cultures, could afford purple at all.

So purple being so rare, so precious, the symbol of royalty here. This is why it is employed here. Remember that elsewhere in scripture, the Lord says that he desires his people to be a kingdom of priests.

Peter calls it a royal priesthood, and that's under the gospel as well. So purple is the symbol of this royal priesthood. Scarlet almost certainly symbolizes blood.

Blood of the sacrifices under the old dispensation. Ultimately, the symbol of the blood of the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God. Slain from the foundation of the world.

Fine twine linen, white in its purity. Again, symbolizing this simple purity and chastity of God's perfection here.

[ 7 : 04 ] With cunning work. It is to be the best workmanship. The best of the best given for the Lord. Precious goods. Precious materials. All that goes into it is to be the finest of everything.

Now, why is God specifying this? Not simply because you're going to say, well, it's meant to be for me. So it's going to be the best that you give to me. There is a sense in which God jolly well ought to have the best.

The best that we can give him. But this is not, as it were, a free will offering from the Israelites themselves. This isn't them saying, how can we honor God? Now, let's see. What are the most precious things?

Well, there's gold, and there's purple, and there's all these things. Now, this is coming from God himself. This is him specifying and directing what is to be used.

And how it is to be used. And there is a sense in which, just as when the Lord meets with his people, there is this mutuality of relationship. He's not just a God afar off.

[ 8 : 02 ] He's a God needed hand. He's the one who comes himself, ultimately, amongst men. And who desires to interact with them, to be in relationship. So what God is really saying to them is that, for the priest who comes on your behalf to me.

For this relationship that I desire to have with you, my people, I desire to put the best into it. I desire to give you, my people, the very best.

And so I direct you to give to me the best. You know, in any relationship of love, if you love someone then with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength, naturally, you would hope, you would desire that it might be mutual, that they would love you back.

And where God is giving his all and his best for his people, he desires that they should symbolize that giving of themselves back again with the best of the best.

They are to give it, but it is he who commands them to give. Precious goods, precious materials, the best of the best. And what we then see thereafter is precious stones.

[ 9 : 15 ] One on each shoulder of the high priest. These on each stones, on which is to be engraved six on each stone of the names of the tribes of Israel, according to their birth, which would imply the eldest first, Reuben, and then Simeon, and then Levi, and then, I can't remember who's fourth after that, sorry.

Judah, obviously, is the sixth. But then we've worked down through all the twelve tribes and six on each shoulder of us. They are born in this way. And so these being born upon the shoulders of the high priest, on these precious stones, it must have been written tiny, even allowing for the fact it's written in Hebrew, which as its symbols would be easier perhaps to inscribe, albeit very small, the flowing writing such as we would have.

It must have been written absolutely tiny on these precious stones, because they're not great big clunking stones like you find in the garden. They'll be sort of maybe a decent sized gem of that size or thereabouts, and it will be set in its clasp with outches of gold, and it's set there, one on each shoulder, even if it's a big junky sort of on each stone.

It's still to be able to write six names on each, they're written tiny. They must be written really small, six on each one. But the precious stones born on the shoulders of the high priest, it doesn't matter how small they are written.

It doesn't matter how small they are engraved. The fact is that they are engraved there. They can't be rubbed out. They can't be painted over because they are cut deep into the stones.

[ 10 : 52 ] All be it in tiny, symbolic writing. Just as we ourselves are of no size or power or great importance in this world.

Just as there's people under the tribes of Israel. You know, there's not every individual name of every person that ever lived in all the tribes there. There's twelve names, six on each shoulder.

And each soul within the people of Israel will know that they are carried. They are carried undercover, as it were, of the name of their tribe.

Their people belonging. They are carried upon the shoulders of the high priest. Now, of course, all the different tribes, if you read through the book of Numbers, then you'll see that they had different numerical strengths.

The tribe of Dan, for example, very, very small. Much more than a family amongst the, extended family amongst the people of Israel. Judah was huge, massive.

[ 11 : 49 ] Other ones were all so big and strong in terms of their numbers. But they're all given exactly the same space. Six on each of these precious stones, born on the high priest's shoulders.

And likewise, again, we have the listing of the precious stones in the breastplate that is to go, to be born on the priest's chest. And the listing of all the precious stones that are there, and how they are to be listed.

The first row shall be a sardius, a tropaz, a carbuncle, and then an emerald, a sapphire, a diamond, a third, a figure, an agate, an amethyst, the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper.

They shall be set in gold in their enclosings. Now, there's another place, of course, where precious stones are listed, and that's in Revelation chapter 21, where the foundations of the holy city are described as each being a precious stone engraved, in that instance, with the names of the apostles of the Lamb.

But the whole list of them are there. It doesn't exactly match. There's about six or seven of them that are a match, depending on how you understand it, whether onyx is the same as sardonyx, and so on.

[ 13 : 02 ] It's likely that it's just different names for the same jewels, for the ones that differ. And by the time you get to the end of Revelation, written in Greek and so on, different culture, thousands of years later on, then it's just a different name that has been given to the same precious stones.

But six or seven of them are the same. Five or six of them are different. But still, the principle is there, that the names engraved of the apostles of the Lamb, forming the foundations of the holy Zion.

And likewise, again, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, born in their robes, four robes, three in each row, likewise, upon the heart of the high priest.

Because these, his people, are precious people. They've got the precious goods and precious materials. They've got the precious stones because they are precious people.

Whatever is the value of these gems and diamonds and amethysts and jaspers and gold and fine twine linen, people are of infinitely greater value.

[ 14 : 11 ] You know, what is the value of a soul? You know, if Jesus says, what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

That would certainly imply that even if you owned the whole world with all its gold and silver and precious jewels and all the mineral wealth and all the vastness of the treasures of the earth, and that was all yours, and you had it all at your disposal, you owned the world literally.

He said, what good is that? You lost your soul. Because the soul is worth all the value of the world put together, and then much more.

The world, if you owned it, would not be enough to pay for your soul. What is the value of a soul? The value of a soul, if it is redeemed, is the life of God the Son upon the cross.

An infinite value, an inexpressible value. That which we cannot contain, that which we cannot enumerate. That if there was only one person to be redeemed in the entire human history of the world, he would still have gone to the cross, he would still have given his life, he would still have suffered and bled and died to redeem that one soul, that infinite price that is paid to redeem that one soul.

[ 15 : 39 ] And how much more then? For all the souls of all the elect. Each one is precious. And each one that will be with him in glory at the last day.

Every soul of every man, woman, and child who is redeemed and elect and will be there in glory with him. They're all of them only there. Because that price has been paid.

Because they were precious people. Some of them, no doubt, will be children who never saw the light of day. They may have died from the womb.

Either violently their lives taken away as a multi-million pound industry, of course, in our culture and country these days. Or else, naturally lost from the womb.

Some of those, perhaps all of them, we don't know exactly. But at least some of those will be with him in glory. Because Christ has paid the price for their souls, for their redemption.

[ 16 : 40 ] Those who come to faith in their dying hours. It is because Christ has died for their souls. Those who come in the freshness of youth and are able to give their lives and all the years of their strength and vigor to the Lord in this world.

They likewise are only saved, only redeemed because Christ has paid the price for them upon the cross. These are precious people for whom the Lord gave his utmost.

He gave his own self. He laid down his life. The life of God the Son in the flesh upon the cross. This is what he has done for his people because they are precious.

And said in that context, you know, to God, his people might be wowed by, oh, diamonds and amethysts and jaspers and all these precious stones. But God, he says, these are the things most precious.

I like your names upon them. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel. And every single one of his people is encompassed somewhere under one of those tribal heads.

[ 17 : 48 ] And every single one of his redeemed people will belong under some category or other, perhaps, in glory. You know, it's, okay, it's speculation.

It's an idle thought, perhaps. You know, you just imagine, like, in glory, the Lord may be organizing or his angels are organizing, right? All redeemed. All those from Scotland over there, from Ireland over there.

Nigeria, if you gather here, and Indonesia over there, and all come together. All redeemed from all this. Right within Scotland, Aberdeenshire over there, Glasgow there. Scalping here. And wherever it may be.

You know, all, it won't matter at the last day. These won't be divisions, but distinctions. The Lord will gather all his people together. We'll all belong under some heading.

Of course, all that will matter at the end is that we belong to Christ. Won't it be good to see all those who have belonged to your particular area, your particular island or city or township or whatever.

[ 18 : 46 ] And to see all those from every age that have belonged to Christ. And to meet with them. Before you go on to enjoy all the vast numbers and eternity of the Lord's redeemed people.

We'll all belong under some heading. Some category somewhere. These are precious people under all the tribal headings. All encompassed within these twelve names.

And born upon the heart of the high priest. Because it's not just, as we say, the precious material or precious goods. The precious stones in which these names are engraved.

Precious people symbolized within these headings and these names. But we have, with the high priest himself here, we have the symbol of both labor and of love.

To carry upon the shoulders is symbolic of labor. To be born upon the shoulders. You know, Jesus had to bear his own cross until he fell beneath it.

[ 19 : 50 ] And Simon of Cyrene had to help him carry it there. But whatever we bear upon our shoulders, it's a burden. It's a weight. It may be a good weight. You know, perhaps some of you, when you were little, maybe your father in particular would stick you up on his shoulders.

And carry you while you're walking. Sort of bounce along with you like that. And maybe we all had that at some point when we were little. But you see that he's doing it with little children still nowadays. It's not a burden.

It's not thinking, oh, Jim's going to carry this wretched child again. No, it's a delight to them. To pick up their little toddler. To stick them on their shoulders. Hold onto their legs and walk along with them.

But it is heavy sometimes. And it is a delight. But it is a burden that is carried. A burden that is carried in love. Which the Lord delights to do.

He bears his people. And he bears them with love. That is what the precious stones upon the shoulders of the high priest symbolize.

[ 20 : 52 ] When he gives blessing or a prophecy to Benjamin in chapter 33 of Deuteronomy. Moses says, Benjamin said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him.

And the Lord shall cover him all the day long. And he shall dwell between his shoulders. And what is true of Benjamin is true of all the Lord's people.

They are born upon his shoulders. They dwell between his shoulders. There is another sense in which of course you are in the New Testament. How Jesus uses the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15.

And he says, What man of you having a hundred sheep if you lose one of them? Doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness. And go after that which is lost. Until he find it. And when he hath found it. He layeth it on his shoulders.

Rejoicing. Rejoicing. He doesn't say, Oh no, I thought I wouldn't have to carry this hefty weight back. This wretched lamb that's gone and wandered off. Now I have to lug it all the way home.

[ 21 : 53 ] I wish to goodness when I was looking for it, I didn't find it. So then I wouldn't have to lug it home. Then I wouldn't have this hefty weight to carry. No, he puts it on his shoulders. Rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying, And rejoice with me.

For I have found my sheep which was lost. He bears it upon his shoulders. It is labor. And yet it is love.

Elsewhere, you know, we turn back a couple of pages from where we were reading. We see in Exodus 19, it says how the Lord says, You have seen what I did unto you.

Unto the Egyptians. How I bear you on eagles' wings. And brought you unto myself. There's the sense here not just of being born on shoulders, plodding along, but being born on the shoulders of the Lord who soars and lifts his people out of bondage, out of Egypt, out of slavery, and brings them to himself.

Likewise, if we go back a little bit in Deuteronomy, we find chapter 32, this lovely description of how it says, how the Lord found his people.

[ 23 : 09 ] The Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the waste, howling wilderness. He led him about.

He instructed him. He kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.

So the Lord alone did lead him. And there was no strange God with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields.

And he made him to suck honey out of the rock and oil, out of the flinty rock and so on. He bears them upon his wings like an eagle. There is this soaring love.

And as well as this labour, because, you know, it's hard work, carrying a hefty weight on your shoulders, whether it's a child, whether it's a sheep, whether it's a whole nation. The high priest is symbolically carrying the names of all the children of Israel upon his shoulders.

[ 24 : 17 ] It is a symbolic labour. A labour of that which nonetheless is precious. Precious stones inscribed with the names of the precious people.

But also, he bears them, says, upon his heart. He bears the judgment of the people of Israel upon his heart.

Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment, verse 29 of Exodus 28 here, upon his heart when he goes in unto the holy place for a memorial before the Lord continually.

Now, the heart we take as being the seed of the emotions, the expression of love. There is labour and there is love here. When he goes in before the Lord's presence, the breastplate of judgment doesn't mean, oh, you're getting judged for all the things you're doing wrong.

It rather means discerning, recognising, seeing before him all the children of Israel expressed upon those precious stones.

[ 25 : 22 ] Their names depicted there. He bears them up as on eagles' wings. So, likewise, we have the Lord with his love of his people dwelling between his shoulders, being born upon his shoulders and upon his heart.

You know, and the more feminine expression of that, of course, remember that man is made in the image of God, both male and female. You think of the bridal love of the Song of Solomon, where he brought, you know, a bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me.

He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. In other words, in the centre, in the heart. It's a more feminine expression. But God, of course, is both masculine and feminine.

Let us make man in our image, male and female. And both types of expression indicate being born upon the heart, being laid upon the heart, because there is this labour and this love.

Finally, we need to recognise that these priestly garments, as well as being precious and all of these things, the best of the best, they are intended as protection for Aaron.

[ 26 : 35 ] Aaron is just a man. And it has been said more than one occasion in the past by a better of a man than myself, but the best of men are that men are best. Aaron is simply a man.

He is simply a sinner, like all the rest of us. He doesn't enter into the Holy of Holies because he's good, or because he's special in any way, or because, you know, he's more worthy than anywhere else. He enters in because God has chosen him to do so.

And he enters in, and he doesn't die in the presence of the Lord because he is clothed in these priestly garments. They are his priestly protection.

The garments, the bells, the pomegranates, described later on in this chapter, if we were to go on and read it, between each of the pomegranates as a bell, and they're depicted with these holy colours and so on, so that as he moves about in the Holy of Holies, the people praying outside can hear the tinkling of the bells.

They can hear he's not dead. He's not been struck down, even in the presence of this holy God. He's able to minister. He's able to do these things, to burn the incense and so on, because he is clothed in this priestly protection.

[ 27 : 47 ] He is doing that which God has commanded. He is clothed with this priestly protection. These garments are his protection. These garments symbolise the go-between, between God and man.

Now, of course, we know, as Timothy tells us, Paul's letter to Timothy tells us, there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

He is our ultimate high priest. He is the one who goes before us into the true presence of the Lord. We are protected in the presence of the Lord by being clothed in his righteousness.

Our prayers could not even enter into God's presence, were they not offered in the name of Jesus, under cover, under clothing, under the protection of his priesthood, of his priestly garments, that perfect righteousness of Christ.

Christ, we have only one mediator. And to that one mediator, we are precious of his sight. Far more precious than stones, or gold, or silver, or jewels, or whatever.

[ 29 : 01 ] Rather, the price of his own life, laid down upon the cross. He offers up that sacrifice. That's what a priest does. He offers sacrifice. He goes between God and man.

Were it not for that, we would perish. Were it not for these priestly garments, Aaron would perish. We can see this, because it says at the end of the chapter here, they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in, unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar, to minister in the holy place, that they bear not iniquity, and die.

They would die, if they weren't clothed, and covered in this way. We turn a couple of pages, we see how the Lord says to Moses, chapter 33, verse 20, thou canst not see my face, there shall no man see me, and live, except they be covered by this priestly protection.

He would die. The priest would die. Nobody could look upon even God's symbolic presence, and live. And nor could we enter into his presence, except we be clothed in the righteousness of our great high priest.

Well, I'm sorry, I know as our time has gone, as you look at, we could go on and talk so much more about this, but I want us to recognize that these holy garments are not just something that's pretty to dazzle, or to impress, that people say, ooh, ah, aren't they made of really precious things.

[ 30 : 27 ] Everything in them is pointing to the relationship between God and his people, a relationship which is precious, which is that which is most holy, and therefore, the best of the best must go into it.

The best of the best must clothe even his appointed high priest to symbolize our great high priest, the one mediator between God and man.

And as he bears the names of the Lord's people upon his shoulders and upon his heart, it indicates to us both the labor, the work of the Lord and the love of the Lord who bears his people, carries them on his shoulders and bears them likewise upon his heart.

When we come to this, perhaps at another time in our own individual meeting, let us remember these things and what they are symbolizing and how they point us ultimately to Christ.

Let us pray. Amen.