

Priesthood Exodus 28, 29

by John Nelson Darby

Christ's priesthood is the exercise of His love and grace towards us, maintaining us in the presence of God and bringing us back to Him.

Scripture: Exodus 28:1

Topics: "Intercession of Christ", "Priesthood"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of the priesthood as a representation of Christ's intercession for His people, illustrating how the garments of the priest symbolize Christ's role in maintaining our relationship with God. He explains that the priesthood is not about acquiring righteousness but about sustaining our walk in the light of God's presence, with Christ bearing our names and weaknesses before God. Darby highlights that Christ's continual intercession is rooted in His love for us, and that our acceptance before God is based on Christ's perfection rather than our own failings. The sermon also discusses the importance of being consecrated to God, emphasizing that true service stems from recognizing our identity as priests in Christ. Ultimately, Darby calls believers to live in the light of Christ's sacrifice and to embrace their role in God's presence.

Transcript

The apostle says, Moses made all things according to the patterns shewed to him in the mount; and again, these "things were patterns of the heavenly things." The doctrines themselves are in the New Testament; the details of things connected with them are in the types.

Priesthood supposes accomplished redemption: not to bring us in, but what we get when brought in. "See how I have borne you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself," the Lord says to Israel. As a people, they were brought to God; but, a feeble and infirm people, they needed this help by the way. We are brought by redemption into the light as God is in the light; but down here we want His priesthood to maintain our walk before Him in the light. The priest is clothed in special garments. These garments are merely figures of that which is real in Christ in the exercise of His priesthood. That which was peculiarly the priest's garment was the ephod. "Doeg turned and fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons who did wear a linen ephod." David with the ephod "inquired of Jehovah." The ephod was made of two pieces: one before and one behind. There were two shoulder pieces, joined at the two edges; a girdle wound round the body to confine it; above that, a foursquare - double, to be a breastplate, containing the names of the children of Israel. There was to be a holy mitre on the head, and upon the skirt

of the ephod the bell and the pomegranate.

All was connected with His people in the priests' garments. If it is the breastplate, the names are engraved in it. If it is the shoulder pieces, the names of the children of Israel are there. If it is the Urim and Thummim, the names of the children of Israel are there. Again I say, it was not to acquire righteousness, but to maintain their cause before God. He is there, acting before God on the people's behalf.

It is not true, then, that we have to get some one to go to God for us who believe. Christ is there for us; and grace is exercised, not because we return, but to bring us back. It is not said, "If any man repent," but, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." The love Christ exercises about us springs directly from Himself. With Peter, it was not after he had fallen that Christ says to him, "I have prayed for thee," but before. His intercession for Peter was going on all the time; and it is because of our getting wrong, not because we are right, that it is exercised. Our feebleness and failure become the occasion for the exercise of this grace. When the intercession of Christ answers in the way of warning, chastening is not needed. Christ looked upon Peter, and it was before Peter wept. The look was just at the right moment. We know not what Peter might have done next, but the look causes him to weep,

171 The priest goes to God for us, not we to the priest. Righteousness and propitiation are there already, and by virtue of His being there, and being what He is there, He can set them right.

Priesthood is Christ undertaking the cause of His people, through the wilderness, maintaining us in the presence of God; keeping us in God's memory, so to speak - "for a memorial." This is a different thing from His shepherd character, strengthening the sheep down here; but it is sustaining them according to the power of inward grace before God. He bears them all in a detailed way, each by name, engraved. As a shepherd He calls His sheep: but also, according to our particular individuality, He bears us on His heart and shoulders. God looks upon us according to the favour He has for Christ Himself. If a person sends his child to me, I receive it according to the affection I have for the father. The priest was there in the garments proper to his office.

When we think of Christ as a priest, we should have in remembrance our individual imperfectness. In one sense we are perfect, but that is in our membership with Him - union with Him our Head.

The breastplate was never to be separate from the ephod, v. 28. "That the breastplate be not loosed from the ephod." Whenever the high priest went into the presence of God, it was in his garments. He could not go without representing the people. It is impossible for Christ to stand there in the presence of God without us.

The girdle was a sign of service; it is the characteristic of a person in service. Christ is a servant for ever. When He became a man, He took upon Him the form of a servant. He might have asked for twelve legions of angels, and gone out free; but then He would have gone out alone. No! He says, I have got my work to do, my wife to care for. And thus He chose to be a servant for ever. He became a servant when incarnate, but He was bound a servant for ever when He gave up His life (Ex. 21). Yes, and He will be the servant; for "He shall gird Himself, and will make them sit down to meat, and come forth to serve them." His divine glory never changes, of course; but He will never give up this character of servant: for ever and ever we shall have this "First-born of many brethren," this new Adam head of the family.

172 Verse 29, "Aaron shall bear the names," etc. Whatever value the Priest has in God's sight, He brings it down upon them. He bears them on His heart. All the love that Christ has for them, He bears them

before God, according to this love. Then in answer they get whatever they need: it may be chastening, it may be strength. He obtains for us all the blessing we need, according to the favour that God bears Him. There is not only the personal favour, but the Urim and Thummim, the ground of their favour, which is in God Himself. The blessing is given according to the light and perfections of God (the meaning of the words being lights and perfections). He bears our judgment according to the light and perfections of God. That is where we are as regards daily judgment. We walk in the light as God is in the light: and as we want cleansing, there is the blood. If I commit a fault, what then; am I condemned? No, because Christ the righteous One is there; but then God must deal with an individual according to this light and perfection. He deals with us according to our need and weakness. He will make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear, because Christ is there. He deals with us just where we are, taking into His account our standing as to grace of course. When they have to learn things of God, it is by the Urim and Thummim also. it is according to the light and perfections of God that He instructs and guides me.

The feebleness, failings, and infirmities, instead of being the occasion of condemnation to me, are the occasion of instruction. The names He is bearing are those for whom there is no wrath. Christ bears Peter on His breast, and He does not pray that he should not be sifted, because He saw the self-sufficiency of Peter needed to be broken down; but He bore him on His heart, and obtained for him the thing he needed, that his faith fail not. His priesthood is exercised for me in putting my heart in a right position before God (not on account of wrath), and He bears us continually before the Lord.

173 There is reference here to another thing we have in virtue of Christ having gone up on high - the Holy Ghost. He received of the Father the gift of the Holy Ghost. He received it alone; but we, the skirts of His garments, get it shed upon us in virtue of His finished work - His accepted work (Psalm 133). The bell and the pomegranate may signify the gifts, testimony and fruit of the Holy Ghost, when Christ went into heaven, and when He will come forth again. "And his sound shall be heard when he goeth into the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not." The mitre is "holiness unto the Lord," and it was to be always upon his forehead.

It is not only when I have failed that Christ intercedes for me, but in holy things; when I go up to worship God, there comes in something that cannot suit the holiness of God - something that has not a bit of sanctified feeling in it; a distracting thought, admiration of fine music, etc., and this for want of habitual communion with the Lord. Well, then, can I say, I have failed, and let it go? There is holiness in Christ for our worship. True, we ought not to be satisfied without the full tide of affection going up to Him from us; but we are accepted because of His work. The iniquity cannot be accepted, but it never goes up. The Christian is always accepted, because in Christ. I may always go to God, because of the continual priesthood exercised. Christ bears my failures that they may be judged; my weakness, that I may get strength; but His heart is always engaged for us. Not merely the abstract love of God for us, which is always true, but this love of Christ ever ready for our necessities. There is evil that wants correction, but He will not put us out of His sight for it: but because you are accepted, He will remedy it.

The object of it all is that our soul should be up there with Christ, walking according to the perfectness of God Himself. When we see Christ for us there, we can venture to apply this light and perfection to our ways. How He has provided for us in love and holiness, for holiness we see stamped in great letters upon it! He is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. The sinner wants the Apostle, the message from God about acceptance. The saint wants the High Priest.

174 Priesthood

Exodus 29.

There is a desire at all times in the people of God, whether in Jewish ignorance or Christian life, that they should always have God dwelling with them. Thus, in Exodus 15, as soon as Moses had come out of Egypt, he said, "He is my God; I will prepare him a habitation." So we are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

We do look to God's dwelling amongst us; yet we have much more thought of dwelling with Him. This was not the case with Israel. We have boldness to enter into the honest, Christ having passed through the heavens for us, as Aaron passed through the tabernacle for them. Israel could not enter within the veil; but Christ has rent it, and opened a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us. God having, in the cross of Christ, put sin away, we can stand in the light of His presence. Here we find the presence of God among them. This is not redemption, the object of which is that we should be with God. We could not meet God without redemption. Christ suffered, the "just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

We learn in this chapter how we can thus be in the presence of God constantly and abidingly. We are really, in title, made "kings and priests to God and His Father"; our provision and character being this, provision is made in Christ for us, so that we can be continually in the presence of God. There was to be the burnt-offering continually at the door of the tabernacle, the place where the Lord met with the people. We are consecrated to God to be priests. Christ has not yet taken upon Him His office as King; but He has taken the priesthood, and therefore we have got, even now, our priesthood. He exercises in heaven continually a perpetual priesthood, filling up in this respect the figure of Aaron, though the order be of Melchisedec.

We see here how we are put in the place of priests, and yet Christ is personally distinguished. Aaron goes first (v. 5-7) alone, to represent Christ; then the sons (v. 8) to represent the whole Church, the priests. In referring to the cleansing of the leper, we have the way a sinner is cleansed from the evil that is in him. It is the same ordinance as regards the leper and the priest; but the leper wants to get cleansed as a sinner, the priest that he may be consecrated to God. If not cleansed in every respect we could not stand before God at all. There was sprinkling of blood on the leper, on the right ear, the right hand, the right toe: his thoughts, his acts, his walk, must be all cleansed, by being brought under the "blood of sprinkling." So in this chapter we are consecrated in the same way. In verse 4, "Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle," etc. You do not find Aaron washed by himself, because Christ did not need it. They are washed together as a figure of the Christian body. Christ as a man identifies Himself with the Church (1 Cor. 12:12). Aaron was anointed (v. 17). The Holy Ghost descended upon Christ when He had been baptized.

175 But before unction we need to be cleansed. The word of God applied to the heart and conscience with power by the Spirit is called washing with the word. "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This is not habitation but washing. Christ came not by water only, but by water and blood. The blood was for expiation, the water for washing, in order to meet God. In anything of Christ's work, it is not a question merely of atonement, but of meeting God. If I think of meeting God, it is what God requires. There must be perfect cleansing. It turns the eye on God Himself. I shall always know evil in myself; but if God is satisfied, so may I be. It is wholesome to look within and judge myself; but I shall not get the blessed peace that flows from faith, if I am looking for it into my own heart. When we see God is satisfied with Christ, then comes in peace; it gives the highest standard of right and wrong, but peace, because God is satisfied with Christ. Washing by water is repeated, not by blood.

Moses clothes him with the priest's robe, and there is no sacrifice here, because Christ required none. He was a perfect man in obedience and love. As man, Christ identifies Himself with His people. He comes into the same place as regards the walk of holiness. He was anointed with the Spirit and with power. All He did was in the power of the Spirit (v. 7, 20-21; Acts 10:38). Christ was anointed as man. When He ascended on high, there He received the promise of the Father, and sent down the Spirit to the saints, so constituting them the Church.

Next, we come to the sons of Aaron (v. 8, 9). We are going to get them introduced into the priesthood, and now comes the sacrifice. Aaron needed none (v. 10-13, 14). There is no sweet savour in the sin-offering or trespass-offering. It must be burnt without the camp. Here it is a sin-offering - sin must be totally put away before our consecration. It is the nature judged before God. Christ is made sin for us, that we may be made priests. We have these two aspects of the value of Christ's work. First, the sin is charged upon Him. In the Hebrew there is no difference between "sin" and "sin-offering." Here He is the sin-offering; He who "knew no sin, made sin for us," etc. Secondly, the other character was offering Himself up to God, all the devotedness of a life of obedience offered up; this was a sweet savour to God. "Therefore hath my Father loved me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again," John 10.

176 In verses 15-18 we find Aaron and his sons not merely having sin taken away, but accepted of God in all the perfection of Christ. If I am looked at as a sinner in myself, the sin is put away, but this is not all. Aaron and his sons put their hands upon the sin-offering; they also identified themselves with the burnt-offering. All the savour of everything that Christ has done, we are in: everything was consumed (v. 18), and put to the test; nothing failed; it is all gone up, and we are in it before God. Here we get our blessed position, previous to consecration as priests. For this, it is not a question of what I think of myself; but the measure of my acceptance is what Christ is in God's presence and estimate. We cannot measure grace by any thing that is fitted for us, but by what is fitted for God.

Verses 19, 21. We come now to the proper character of those persons that are cleansed and accepted. Now it is to consecrate, and, as in cleansing the leper, the blood is put on the right ear, right hand, and right foot - the acts, thoughts, and walks. We are now consecrated to God in all these. We have to render unto the Lord our bodies as well as our spirits; for we are not our own, but bought with a price. Every act that Christ did was as perfect as His sacrifice, but every step made it increasingly difficult. So we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Christ's conduct and Christ's devotedness are the measure of our walk before God. There is not so much as to set one's foot on left for self-will. Christ did not come to do His own will. Even to death He went, the death of the cross. So with us, if the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. If the heart is right, it makes the aim right. The apostle says, "Not that I have already attained . . . but this one thing I do," etc. He exercised himself day and night "to have a conscience void of offence." Then it is real liberty. If the heart be right, it will be joy; if not, it will be terrible, because there is not the smallest liberty given to self-will. In many things we fail; but if we feel what sin is and the claim God has on us, it will be our privilege to do His will. It is not a pretence that we are set up as something wonderful. No, it is faith in the blood of Christ that has cleansed us as to purpose and thought according to the perfectness of Christ; and now we are consecrated to serve God. It is simple Christianity.

177 Verse 21 shews them consecrated by the blood put upon their persons; but not only so, for there is the anointing with the Spirit of God to give power and energy for action. It was put on the "sons' garments with him." I have got the power of Christ in heaven, and the power of the Spirit that comes down from Christ for garments (that is, for all that I appear in before the world). It is "with Him," a thorough, complete association by the power of the Spirit with a crucified Christ who is now in heaven. Thus we get real

thorough joy and gladness of heart. The first fruits are with God, the result are in what we shew to men. If peace and joy are in my heart, let me go in that, and it produces joy and gladness in my ways. The beginning of all practical fruits is from what we have with God, and then there is a testimony to men. What we really are with God shews itself out. It is, or should be, the effect of the consciousness of union with Christ.

This anointing of the Spirit can be put on us, because the blood is on us. Aaron had no blood put on him. The Spirit is the seal. The least relic of sin would prevent Him from sealing; but when the blood has cleansed from sin, then the seal is applied. The presence of the Spirit is the witness of the blood-shedding; the fruits are the witness of the Spirit. We thus get a wonderful power, stamp, and measure of holiness. If we believe in Christ., we are so cleansed that the Spirit can come and dwell in us. The Spirit is the seal to the value of Christ's work, not to what He is going to produce. Now He can fill Aaron's hands (v. 23, 24). What is produced by the Spirit is Christ's after all. I can come with an object now that I know God delights in it. Suppose I praise Christ's name, I know God's delight rests on it; it may be imperfectly done, but I know what the thing is to God, not the manner of my presenting it. It is the sweet savour of Christ to God.

178 We feed on Christ (v. 31, 32), now that He has given us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. We gather strength and grace, and comfort, the perfectness of Christ Himself, as our souls' food. "He that eateth me, even he shall live by me." We come so to think of Christ, so to realize in our hearts and spirits what He is, that we live Christ. What a man thinks is what he is, more than what he does. A man may think of sin, and love it, and desire to do it, but will not because of his character; he may be a hypocrite. If I realize Christ in my heart, I am a Christian.

Verse 42 shews a continual burnt-offering at the place where God meets the people. Christ is before God day by day continually, a sweet savour. I cannot go to God without finding the savour of Christ there, in the perfect sweetness of His offering.

The reason (we hear in Genesis 8) God gave for not cursing is that He looks to Noah's sacrifice, not to the sin. God deals with us in virtue of what the Mediator is, instead of what we are. It ought to be always in our hearts, but it is always before God. When the daily sacrifice was taken away, the Jew could not go to God; there was no savour; see Dan. 8:11.

In verses 42, 43, it is "I will meet you to speak there to thee." It is through Christ we gain everything. Finally, God says (v. 45, 46), "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God." It is by the Spirit He does so now. The whole Church is His dwelling-place. He is not merely a Redeemer, but a constant dweller with the people; as verse 46 shews, it was not to do an act and then leave them. So it is with the Church in a still more blessed way.

But let us never forget that sin is put away first; then there is the continual savour where God meets us; and we are consecrated to His service. It supposes that the heart is right; for I cannot wish to be consecrated to God and have my own will. The death of Christ will never find its intelligent value in our hearts, if we want to escape the consequences of consecration. If we are consecrated, the motive of every action should be that Christ may be glorified. You cannot be happy unless Christ be everything. We may have to condemn ourselves daily; but when we think what a savour is before God we on with confidence.

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