

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

LEVITICUS 8:1-36

WE CELEBRATE JESUS AS OUR HIGH PRIEST AS HE CALLS US AND CONSECRATES US AS PRIESTS OF HIS NEW COVENANT WITH HUMANKIND.

I. THE CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD (VS 1-9)

Jesus Calls Us To His Priesthood.

- A. A COMMAND TO HOLINESS (1-5)
- B. A COMMITMENT TO HOLINESS (6)
- C. THE CLOTHING OF HOLINESS (7-9)

II. THE CONSECRATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD (VS 10-21)

We Have Been Set Apart To Serve God.

- A. ASSIGNED AND GIFTED (10-13)
- B. PURIFIED (14-17)
- C. COMMITTED (18-21)

III. THE CELEBRATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD (VS 22-36)

We Are Incredibly Blessed To Be Called And Consecrated By God. He Has Given Us A New Identity And A New Purpose.

- A. DEDICATION (22-25)
- B. PEACE (26-32)
- C. PATIENCE AND OBEDIENCE (33-36)

IV. EPILOGUE

The Priesthood of All Believers

Leviticus 8:1-36

Last time we were together, we talked about the fellowship offering that could also be translated as the peace offering. We learned that when we are at peace with God and when we are in fellowship with God, we also become a blessing to the community.

This morning, we are going to study through the first official ordination ceremony in Israel's history. We will witness the ordination of Aaron, Moses' brother and Aaron's sons. Aaron is going to become the first High Priest and his sons, the first ministering priests.

I want us to fully understand this event. However, I would like for us to allow this ceremony to cause us to think about what God has called us to through Jesus. If we are believers in Jesus Christ, then we must come to realize that we are all priests.

I do see the reasoning behind ordaining people for ministry. However, at the same time I see the harm in it. When we ordain pastors to ministry, the rest of the congregation sets up this false dichotomy between them and the ministry. The reasoning of most Christians is that there is the pastor, and the rest of us. The pastor is ordained to do all the spiritual stuff. But if I read the Bible correctly, there is no such dichotomy in the church. We are all called to the priesthood under the ministry of our High Priest, Jesus.

I kind of look back at my ordination now and think that I didn't even have a clue as to what I was in for. But I do remember that I had some very clever classmates. Part of our seminary experience was to interview with regional superintendents for church placement. I watched three of my friends interview with a superintendent who was in charge of a very wealthy section around San Francisco in California. The superintendent said, "I have this one very troubled church and I need to send a pastor there right away. Money is no object for this church but they have a tendency to eat up pastors." The superintendent thought all the candidates were qualified so he asked the first candidate, "How much would this church have to pay you in order for you to accept the job?" My first friend, Pastor George responded, "I think I would go for about \$100,000."

The superintendent asked my next friend the same question. Pastor Bill said, "I think I would need to get about \$200,000."

Finally, the superintendent approached my last friend, Pastor Dan with the same question, "How much do you think you would ask for?" Pastor Dan said, "If you give me \$300,000, I'll keep \$100,000, I'll give you \$100,000, and we'll send Pastor George."

Well my friend certainly knew how to work the system. But ordination is meant to be an outward demonstration of our total dedication to God and to doing His will, His way. As we study through this first Jewish ordination, let's see how this relates to us as the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

I would like to start this morning's study by quoting a passage from the Apostle Peter:

"⁴Come to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by the people, but he is precious to God who chose him. ⁵And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:4-5 / NLT).

Please do not miss those words. If you are a believer, then you are a priest and your purpose is to offer spiritual sacrifices. God has called each one to be a priest. In order to please God, we all must accept this role and we must allow God to use us as He chooses. As we study through

the actual sacrifices and the actual ordination process, we must keep in mind that each one of us is called to the priesthood. If we are not willing to accept our call to the priesthood, then we are not real Christians. That brings me to the main idea of this morning's text. **WE CELEBRATE JESUS AS OUR HIGH PRIEST AS HE CALLS US AND CONSECRATES US AS PRIESTS OF HIS NEW COVENANT WITH HUMANKIND.**

Again let me say this. This passage describes the original ordination in the religion of Israel. At the time of this ordination, they are still in the wilderness and have not yet entered the land of Israel. They are just 1 year out of their Egyptian captivity. They have just finished the construction and dedication of the Worship Tent that became known as the Tabernacle. If we put all the accounts together, it seems as if no sacrifices have been offered up yet.

I. THE CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD (VS 1-9) *Jesus Calls Us To His Priesthood.*

Verses 1-9 should remind us that each one of us has received the call to the priesthood. In other words, **JESUS CALLS US TO HIS PRIESTHOOD.** I have already read from Peter's letter to the church so let's see how this all applies to us.

A. A COMMAND TO HOLINESS (1-5)

In verses 1-5 the prospective priests are given a command to holiness. This section starts out a lot like the beginning of the book. Again the Lord spoke to Moses. This time God instructed Moses on how to set apart and ordain Aaron and his sons to the official priesthood. In verses 4 and 5 the phrase, "the LORD commanded," shows up two times. Throughout this chapter, that phrase or one similar to it appears 11 times. The context of this ordination process and the description of the priestly garments are found in Exodus 28-29. God gave these instructions on Mt. Sinai. However, right after that in chapter 32 of Exodus, we find Aaron building a Golden Calf for Israel to worship. Not only did he build this idol, when Moses confronted him, he still refused to take personal responsibility for the act. Listen to how he responds to Moses:

"²²Don't get upset, sir," Aaron replied. "You yourself know these people and what a wicked bunch they are. ²³They said to me, 'Make us some gods to lead us, for something has happened to this man Moses, who led us out of Egypt.' ²⁴So I told them, 'Bring me your gold earrings.' When they brought them to me, I threw them into the fire—and out came this calf!" (Exodus 32:22-24 / NLT).

This is the Aaron that God is going to command Moses to ordain as the High Priest of Israel. In chapter 40 of Exodus, the Tabernacle and its courtyard were set up. In our passage this morning, God commands Moses that now is the time to follow through with this ordination process. These are not God's guidelines or suggestions. They are God's commands. I think that too often we forget that God is a holy God and what He commands, He expects us to do. We will see next week that it is dangerous to not obey God perfectly.

But for now, God commands Moses to set apart Aaron and his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, to be priests. Remember that is what the word holy means. Holy means that something, someone, or someplace is being set apart for God's particular usage. These 5 men are to leave everything behind and all they are supposed to do from now on is to minister at the worship tent. They are to guide Israel spiritually and they are to offer up sacrifices for them. In fact, when Israel finally enters the land, the tribe of Levi is not given a territory. They are set apart by God for His ministry.

I don't think we can remind one another of this enough. As God's children and as His chosen priests, we no longer have a normal life. We have been set apart from the rest of the world by God to do His will. I know I forget this too many times. I forget that this world is not my home and I too often look to the things of this world to make me happy or to fulfill me. God has not suggested that we be set apart from the things of this world, He has commanded it. When we acknowledged Jesus as our Savior, we confessed Him as our Lord. When we were baptized, we publicly declared that we died to the things of this world and the only reason for living now is to do the will of God. I don't know where you are, but I can tell you that I am very far away from achieving this goal. But the point is this. Moses publicly gathered up Aaron and his sons, the priestly clothing, the priestly sacrifices, and gathered them together in front of the worship tent. Just as certain as God commanded Aaron and his sons to be set apart for ministry, Jesus has commanded you and me to be set apart for His ministry. Do you view yourself as a priest? Do you live as though only serving God is your only purpose in life? Again, I must say I'm a long way from that.

B. A COMMITMENT TO HOLINESS (6)

But verse 6 reminds us that we must make a personal commitment to holiness. As Aaron and his sons stepped forward in obedience to God's call, Moses washed them. This was clearly a sign of their need to be spiritually cleaned up. Washing themselves with water, and washing the sacrifice with water became an intricate part of the religious ceremonies of Israel.

Our baptism also carries this meaning of cleansing. Yes, baptism is a symbol of our dying to the things of this world and to self. But it is also a sign of the cleansing from sin we receive through Jesus' blood. If we truly believe that we have been cleaned up by Jesus' blood, then we ought to make a commitment not to run right back and dirty ourselves up again with sin. We must make a commitment to remain clean and pure. Holiness is a lifelong commitment.

C. THE CLOTHING OF HOLINESS (7-9)

Verses 7-9 describe the clothing of holiness. These are all described in detail in Exodus chapter 28. When we studied through the book of Exodus, we described these clothes in depth. I will just mention them in passing. The High Priest wore a tunic, the undergarments, along with a sash and a robe. The High Priest was dressed very opulently and he could be identified easily. The Ephod was worn outside and he wore a breastplate. There were 12 precious stones on the breastplate that represented the 12 tribes of Israel. Every time the High Priest ministered, burned incense, offered up sacrifices, and went into the Holy of Holies, he represented the whole nation of Israel: every person. On his head, he wore a turban with the words, "Holy to Jehovah" inscribed on a gold plate on it. As he walked around the camp and to the worship area, he could clearly be identified as the person set apart by God to do ministry. The Urim and Thummim were dice-like objects used by him to discern God's will for the people.

One interesting thing to me is that no footwear is ever mentioned. Perhaps that is because the priests carried out their duties on holy ground. There were never to be shoes worn on holy ground. As Moses approached the burning bush, listen to what God told him:

¹⁵"Do not come any closer," God told him. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground" (Exodus 3:5 / NLT).

As God's priests today, we are to wear the priestly garments He has prepared for us. In the book of Ephesians, we are instructed to wear the Belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword of God's Word, the Bible, and the shoes of the gospel. We are to be God's salvation people of truth, faith, and righteousness.

In Colossians Paul goes on to say that we should be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, thankfulness, and love. These are the clothes of God's priests today. Again, I don't think we take these commands seriously enough. If Aaron or his sons showed up to the worship tent not properly dressed, God would kill them at worst, or not accept the sacrifices they made at the very least.

As God's chosen children, we are not given the option what to wear. We have been commanded to be holy. We have been commanded to live holy. Our only response is that we must commit ourselves to living holy. There is no doubt about this fact if we want to claim to be Christians. **JESUS CALLS US TO HIS PRIESTHOOD.**

II. THE CONSECRATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD (VS 10-21) ***We Have Been Set Apart To Serve God***

Verses 10-21 describe the ceremony of the consecration to the priesthood. For us, we must remember that **WE HAVE BEEN SET APART TO SERVE GOD.**

A. ASSIGNED AND GIFTED (10-13)

Verses 10-13 remind us that we have been assigned and gifted. Let me state this up front in this section so we don't get bogged down in the details and miss the meaning for us. To summarize what we said in the last section we could say that God saved us for a purpose. We are His children who He has commissioned as priests. Just as the priest was set apart from the rest of the nation by the colorful and opulent clothes he wore, we Christians should stand out from the rest of the world as we wear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we should be identified by our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Jesus has called us and clothed us.

But further, He has gifted us and commissioned us. All throughout the New Testament, we are reminded that we are to continue on with the work Jesus started until He returns to complete all things. In other words, we are to bring healing and wholeness to a lost and hurting world. God has given us supernatural spiritual gifts, natural talents and abilities, and all sorts of resources: time, money, energy, etc.

Even more amazing is this. In addition to clothing us and gifting us, He has placed us in particular places at particular times to accomplish good works. We often quote these verses to demonstrate that we are saved by grace through faith. However, listen to the whole passage. It is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

"⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast." We are all familiar with that concept. But let's track the next verse, "¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10 / NIV).

God has saved us with the intent that we use all our gifts, talents, abilities, and resources to accomplish good works that He has prepared for us to do in advance. God has prepared us and He has prepared situations for us to enter into and accomplish His work. In other words, we are His priests.

In verses 10-13 we see that through Moses, God assigned and gifted Aaron and his sons to do ministry. In these 4 verses, Moses anoints Aaron and the worship tools. There are two words used here. The first is the word consecrated. That word in Hebrew is *qadash* that literally means to make holy. By anointing the tent, the furniture, the water basin, the altar, and Aaron,

God set these things and Aaron apart from all others to do ministry. There were other water basins, furniture, and people in the camp. However, from this day forward, the furniture and everything that was consecrated could not be used for anything except the purpose in worship it served. Aaron was now set apart from all other people. He could no longer live a "normal" life. He was totally dedicated to God. Aaron's four sons were also dressed and dedicated to God's service.

We need to start looking at our lives, our gifts, our talents, our time, our abilities, and all our resources as holy. In other words, we should be totally sold out to God.

The next word we need to pay attention to in these verses is the word anointing. The word in Hebrew is *mashach*. It is the word we get Messiah from. In Israel, three kinds of people were ceremonially anointed: The priest, the prophet, and the king. Jesus is the ultimate Anointed One. Jesus perfectly fulfills the role of our High Priest, our Prophet, and our King. Oil was a sign of God's Holy Spirit. When they saturated a person with this anointing oil, it was symbolic of God soaking them, saturating them, filling them completely with His Holy Spirit. At Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.

If we are true believers, then we have received the Holy Spirit. God has filled us and continues to fill us with His Holy Spirit.

B. PURIFIED (14-17)

In verses 14-17, Aaron and his sons were purified. Moses took the bull, slaughtered it, took some of the blood, and smeared it on the four corners of the altar to purify it. Then he took the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys with their fat, and burned them up on the altar. Moses burned the rest of animal up outside the camp at a ceremonially clean place. The description here is one of atonement. It is a purification ceremony. It makes the altar an acceptable place for worship and it makes Aaron acceptable in God's sight.

I don't think this is too hard for us to make the jump to understand that the only way we can ever be right with God is through the cleansing blood of Jesus shed for us. I can never be right with God by doing good or religious stuff. I can only be in a right relationship with God by trusting in Jesus and the blood He shed for me. Are you starting to understand how precious the blood of Jesus is and how much personal suffering He endured so that we could be in a right relationship with God? I think it is critical that everything we own and everything we are must be purified by the blood of Jesus. As I serve God by preparing a sermon or giving money, or anything, that all is cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Otherwise they would all be useless.

C. COMMITTED (18-21)

In verses 18-21, Aaron and his sons are committed to the ministry. This is the description of a burnt offering. If you remember, the entire animal was burned up on the altar. Nothing was held back. As Aaron and his sons place their hands on the animal, they are symbolizing several things: First, their personal guilt is transferred to the animal. Secondly, the ownership of the animal is transferred from them to God. And finally, it symbolizes their total dedication to God.

When people give their lives totally to God, it pleases Him. Let me quote Paul one more time. In his letter to the Romans he says this:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers (and sisters), in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1 / NIV).

Sometimes I think we get confused because we call what we do here on Sunday mornings, worship. However, if I read the Bible correctly, worship is how we conduct our everyday lives,

totally committed to serving God with our lives, and with all our gifts, talents, and resources. Worship is our total commitment to God. The fact is this. **WE HAVE BEEN SET APART TO SERVE GOD.** Again, I have to say that when I evaluate my Christian walk according to these kinds of standards, I am really pathetic. However, with the help of God and my accountability group, I will make a great deal of progress in my pursuit of holy living and holy dedication.

III. THE CELEBRATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD (VS 22-36) ***We Are Incredibly Blessed To Be Called And Consecrated By God. He Has Given Us A New Identity And A New Purpose.***

Sometimes I get the feeling that people perceive holy living as boring. But in verses 22-36 the celebration of the priesthood is described in detail. For us, we must continually celebrate our new life in Christ. **WE ARE INCREDIBLY BLESSED TO BE CALLED AND CONSECRATED BY GOD. HE HAS GIVEN US A NEW IDENTITY AND A NEW PURPOSE.**

A. DEDICATION (22-25)

In verses 22-25, Moses dedicates Aaron and his sons. The word here in Hebrew is *millu*. The NIV translates it as ordination. In the ordination ceremony, Moses slaughtered a ram, took some blood and put some of it on Aaron and his sons' right ears, on the thumb of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Now what's interesting about this word used for ordination is that it means to set something in place. It would be like a jeweler setting a precious stone in a ring. It could be like the stones set in the breastplate of the High Priest. It could be like setting a cornerstone in a wall. By ordaining them, Moses, on behalf of God, was setting these men into the service of God and Israel. Think about the significance of the anointing of blood. Most people were right handed and the right hand or the right position was considered to be the hand or position of power and strength. Moses was dedicating the priests to listen for God's leading by anointing their ears with blood. He was dedicating them to do God's will and work by anointing their thumbs with blood. He was dedicating them to walk in holiness by anointing their big toes with blood.

In a Roman Catholic worship service, before the Gospel is read, the congregation members make the sign of the cross on their foreheads, on their lips and on their hearts. The symbol is "May Christ be on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart." Perhaps that would be a good practical exercise for us periodically throughout the day. It may remind us that we are God's people. As priests, we need to be committed to listening for His voice, doing His will, and walking in holiness. It would be great to consciously remind ourselves to have Jesus on our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. God has installed us as His ambassadors to this lost and hurting world.

B. PEACE (26-32)

In serving God, we find peace as described in verses 26-32. Here we see the fellowship or peace offering made by Moses on their behalf. We already described how the wave offering was made and what it symbolized. What is interesting here is first of all, the normal portion for the priest was the right thigh. However, here, Aaron and his sons waved their portion and offered up on the altar as a burnt offering. But Moses' share of the ordination was the breast. Moses waves his portion before God. However, Moses gives his portion to Aaron and his sons to eat and he once again sprinkles blood and oil on the priests' clothes. As we said before, when we

are right with God, we enjoy a peaceful, joyful, and fulfilling relationship with God. As a result of this, we are a blessing to those around us. The newly ordained priests enjoyed the feeling of being in a right relationship with God. They were confident that God placed them in a position to be a blessing to the entire nation. And they enjoyed the provision of God as they ate the meat of the sacrifice in the worship area.

If we pursue holy living and enjoy a right relationship with God, we will experience peace, joy, and contentment. And we will be a blessing to all those around us. Who are we? We are children, priests, and ambassadors of God. What is our purpose in life? Our purpose is to serve God by being a blessing to those around us.

And what is the Christian life all about? It is all about learning to walk in patience and obedience as described in verses 33-36. The priests were required to stay at the entrance of the worship tent for seven days. Seven is always a significant number in the Bible. It is the number of perfection and completion. God created the universe in seven days. Here He created the priesthood for the Israelites and the High Priest would be a type of the ultimate High Priest, Jesus: Who was perfect and the final completion to the High Priesthood. Jesus is our High Priest and He constantly intercedes for us with the Father.

C. PATIENCE AND OBEDIENCE (33-36)

But the interesting thing to me is that God made them wait for seven days. One of the lessons we Christians must learn on our way to maturity is patience. We have come to expect instant results and instant gratification. Patience is the quality by which we can wait on God to accomplish all He has promised. God is beyond time. Oftentimes God fulfills promises He has made to us after we have died. The prime example is that God promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation, that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky, and that he would inhabit the land of Canaan. However, Abraham only saw his son Isaac born and maybe a grandson, but not much more. Abraham never possessed any real land during his lifetime. However, Abraham's legacy still lives 4,000 years later in the modern state of Israel. I know we are not good at waiting. But our patience is an opportunity for us to demonstrate our love for and trust in God's timing.

In addition to patience, the Christian walk consists of simple obedience. It was not for Aaron and his sons to ask why God wanted them to stay at the worship tent. God told them to stay there. Their only job was to obey and stay there. That's another thing we are not good at. We like to bend the rules and make our own rules. The Bible is pretty clear as to what God expects of us. The only thing for us to do is to obey. God has called us to walk in holiness. He has given us the Holy Spirit to assist and guide us. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has given us life. As we said before, God has prepared us and prepared situations for us to bring His presence to. When you stop and think about it, **WE ARE INCREDIBLY BLESSED TO BE CALLED AND CONSECRATED BY GOD. HE HAS GIVEN US A NEW IDENTITY AND A NEW PURPOSE.**

IV. EPILOGUE

It is something for us to ponder as we watch priests carry out their duties throughout the book of Leviticus and throughout the entire Old Testament, let's keep in mind that Jesus is our High Priest and we serve under Him as priests to this lost and hurting world. **WE CELEBRATE**

JESUS AS OUR HIGH PRIEST AS HE CALLS US AND CONSECRATES US AS PRIESTS OF HIS NEW COVENANT WITH HUMANKIND.

I don't know where this story comes from but it nicely demonstrates the dedication we need to have in order to serve as God's holy people.

"A servant of Christ, who for many years served her Lord in the Congo, wrote what she called her COVENANT OF DEDICATION, and signed it with her blood. It was worded:

'Lord Jesus, I belong to Thee from head to foot, and will always be Thine for Thou hast redeemed me. Thou art the King of my life and hast absolute and undivided rule over all my affections and will and desire. My chief aim in life shall be to please Thee, so do Thou change me and cleanse me and use me as Thou wilt. I ask Thee to help me loyally to keep this covenant which I seal with my own blood because I am willing to lay down my life for Thy sake, if Thou should'st ask me.'"

How serious are we about pursuing Jesus by living lifestyles of holiness? Jesus said that in order for us to be His followers, we must lay down our lives, pick up our crosses, and follow Him. He has prepared us, equipped us, and ordained us for the priesthood. If indeed He is our Lord, then we better take our calling very seriously.