The Priestly Garments

Exodus 28:1-43

Key Verse: 28:2 “Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor.”

Romans 13:14a. “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ…”

Last Sunday we studied about the tabernacle. What does the word ‘tabernacle’ mean? It means “dwelling”. God wanted to dwell among his people at the tabernacle. We also learned that we have to restore the throne of God in our hearts. Restoring the throne of God means practicing the Lordship of Christ Jesus over our lives. This means that we acknowledge that Jesus is our King and that we are his holy priests. When we restore the throne of God in our lives, the Holy Spirit works in us and among us. God is with us and in us through the Holy Spirit.

Today we will study about the priestly garment. As God gave detailed instructions on the tabernacle, so too did he also give detailed instructions for the priestly garments, especially for Aaron and his sons. The priestly garments are not ordinary pieces of clothing, but extraordinary ones with dignity and honor because they are made for priests whom God chose. Today we will study how the priestly robe is designed and the meaning and purpose of each part. In Korean proverbs there is saying, “Clothing is a person’s wing.” This means that the clothing a person wears shows their identity and attitude. When we look at how and what they wear, we figure out who they are and what kind of job they have. When they wear uniforms, we recognize that they were military or police officers. When they wear gowns, we realize that they work in health care centers. When they wear jeans, we recognize them as construction workers, and so on. In the same way when we know about priestly garment, we know who priests should be and what kind of role they have. The priestly garment also displays the image and role of Christ Jesus as the interceder and high priest.

The purpose: There are two main purposes for this garment: to serve the Lord and to give dignity and honor. All clothes are made for a purpose. The priestly garment was designed to serve the Lord. In verses 1-2 God told Moses to call his brother Aaron and his four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar to serve Him as priests and gave them dignity and honor. Look at verse 2. When we study each part of the garment, we know how it is designed and made to serve the Lord and give priests dignity and honor.

The priestly garments are mainly comprised of six parts. Look at verse 4. “***These are the garments they are to make: a breatpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests***.” First, the ephod (6-14). Ephod is a kind of ceremonial vestment which gives dignity and honor to priests. It should be woven of gold, blue, purple and scarlet yarn with finely twisted linen. The special features of the ephod were two onyx stones on the shoulders which were engraved with the 12 names of the Israelites, 6 names on each stone. Verse 9 says, “***Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel.***” The two stones with the names of the 12 tribes of Israelites were a memorial before the Lord. It was a memorial for the covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The stones show the faithfulness of God and his enduring love and care for his people. It also reminds the priest of being responsible for his people as their representative and interceder. Verse 12 says, ***“…and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord.***” Jesus is our high priest who interceded between God and us. He took the burden of the whole world on his shoulders and climbed up the hill of Golgatha. On the cross he shed his precious blood and became the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn 2:2) The prophet Isaiah prophesied this in Isaiah 9:6, “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders…*.” Praise Jesus who took up our infirmities and transgressions on his shoulders and died on the cross!

Second, The breastpiece (15-30) They call it ‘the breastpiece of decision.’ (29) Look at verse 15. “***Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions-the work of skilled hands. Make it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen***.” The reason why it is called ‘the breastpiece of decision’ is the Urim and the Thummim. Still, we don’t know how they looked like and how they were used for making decisions. But the words, ‘Urim and Thummim’ mean ‘Lights and Perfection.’ The high priest used these to determine the will of God in times of crisis and to make decision for important matters. For example, according to Numbers 27:12-27 when Moses handed over his leadership to Joshua, he asked Joshua to stand before the whole assembly of Israelites and the priest Eleazar, who would know God’s will through the Urim. (27:21) It was like casting lots among the Israelites to know God’s will in their decision making.

The breastpiece was decorated with twelve precious stones which we cannot even pronounce properly (16-20). 12 stones represent 12 tribes of Israel. (21) When the high priest wears the breastpiece and enters the Holy Place, he represents the whole of the Israelites and bears them in his heart. The high priest loads the weight of his people on his shoulder through an ephod, and now he bears their destiny in his heart through the breastpiece. In this way the high priest intercedes between God and his people.

This reminds us of Jesus’ compassionate prayer for Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37. Jesus lamented, “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”* Jesus’ heart was broken when the people of Jerusalem didn’t accept him but instead tried to kill him.As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, Jesus bore Jerusalem in his heart and prayed for them as a high priest. Jesus also prayed earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane in order to follow the will of God the Father. At that time, Jesus was carrying the cross of the whole world on his shoulder and bore the destiny of the whole world in his heart, and he prayed, “*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*.” (Mt 26:39) He didn’t seek his own will, but followed the Father’s will. Even though Jesus did not wear the breastpiece or the ephod, he did so because he came to intercede between God and us.

Third, the blue robe (31-35) . Under the ephod was a long, sleeveless blue robe which was woven without a seam. Look at verse 31. ***“Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth,***…” Blue is the color of heaven. The priest stands between heaven and earth as an interceder. He is God’s representative to his people and the people’s representative to God. Around the hem of the robe should be blue, purple, and scarlet alternating pomegranates and golden bells. (33-34) The sound of the bells is very significant. It is like an alarm buzzer. Look at verse 35. “***Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die.***” According to this verse, the sound of the bells signifies the destiny of the priest when he works in the Holy Place. Whenever the priest moves, the bells make a sound. If people cannot hear the bell sound, they might notice that something might happen to the priest. As the minister of Christ we also need these golden bells in our hearts so that we may be spiritually awakened when we serve the Lord. Can you hear the bells jingling in your heart now?

Fourth, a turban (36-39). The priest should wear a white linen turban which gifts him with dignity and honor. There should be a golden plate fastened to the front of the turban with the inscription, “HOLY TO THE LORD”. The Lord said in verse 38. “***It will be on Aaron’s forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.***” This inscription is the seal of consecration to the Lord’s service. The priest should be holy as the Lord is holy. The priest should know that he is working in the presence of the Holy God in the Holy Place. According to Josephus the historian, high priests worked bare foot in the tent of meeting because it is the holy ground. (Ex 3:5)

In Leviticus 11:44-45 the Lord said to Moses and the Israelites, “*I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy…I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy*.” Being holy is God’s message not only for Moses and the Israelites, but for all Christians today including you and me. Peter the Apostle urged the Christians in 1 Pe 1:15, “*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy*.” Jesus is the Holy One of God. As he is holy, we should be holy, too! We don’t have to put the inscription on our forehead, but we should engrave it in our heart.

Fifth, a linen tunic (40-44): Look at verse 40. “***Make tunics, sashes and caps for Aaron’s sons to give them dignity and honor***.” The tunic was a long white linen coat worn under the blue robe. The white fine linen symbolizes purity and simplicity. The priest should serve the Lord with a pure heart and with complete devotion. Jesus completed his messianic work through his death on the cross. Jesus was wrapped with fine linen after he was crucified. (Mk 15:46) The fine linen was folded into itself in the tomb after Jesus was resurrected. (Lk 24:12, Jn 20:5) The linen tunic was common clothing among the Jew, but when it is worn by a priest, it has a spiritual significance.

Look at verse 41. “***After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.***” God provided the special garment for priests so that they could work as priests with dignity and honor. As we studied, each part of the garment has a special meaning and purpose. Moses anointed and ordained Aaron and his sons so that they could serve the Lord as priests. There is no priestly system today in Christian churches. Jesus completed the work of salvation through his death on the cross. Hebrews says that Jesus as our High Priest took his own blood into the Most Holy Place and completed our eternal salvation once and for all. (He 9:12) Therefore we don’t need to wear the priestly garment even though we are chosen people and royal priesthood. (1Pe 2:9) Now we have to clothe with the Lord Christ Jesus. Paul said in Romans 13:13-14, “*Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*” What does it mean to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ? As Paul mentioned, we must not follow the desires of the flesh, but live by the Holy Spirit. When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our old self dies with him and new self lives again with him. We put aside our old, dirty, smelly, sinful cloths and put on new garment, our Lord Jesus Christ. As I mentioned above, what we wear and how we clothe is very important. When we clothe ourselves with Christ Jesus, we look like Jesus, act like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and live like Jesus. We live as we wear. So Paul said, “*The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light*.” (Ro 13:12) Today I ask all of you to change your cloths. Put off your old, dirty, smelly, sinful cloths, and put on the holy, priestly garments which are provided by Jesus Christ. Amen!

**The Priestly Garments (Exodus 28)**

\*Ephod: ceremonial vestment two stones with 12 names Is 9:6, 1 Jn 2:2

\*Breastpiece: breastpiece of decision Urim & Thummim Nu 27:21, Mt 23:37; 26:39

\*Blue robe: intercessory cloths

\*Turban: linen cap golden plate inscribed “HOLY TO THE LORD”

Ex 3:5, Lev11:44-45, 1 Pe 1:15

\*Linen Tunic: long inner coat purity and simplicity Mk 15:46, Lk 24:12,

Jn 20:5

\*Sash: girdle readiness for work