

## **Priestly Garments**

**Exodus 38:21–39:31**

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to the Book of Exodus and to the chapter 38:21. We are just three or so sermons away from the end of this book, and tonight we're really at our last long reading. Next readings are going to be shorter, concentrating on some specific aspects of the final couple of chapters of the book. Tonight we're going to pick up in chapter 38, verse 21 where Moses begins to account for the cost of the tabernacle and the precious metals that had been given by the congregation for its construction, and then in chapter 9, his account of the making of the priestly garments. So, let's open our Bibles there and begin hearing God's word at Exodus 38:21.

“This is the number of the things for the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were numbered according to the command of Moses, for the service of the Levites, by the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. Now Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD had commanded Moses. With him was Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver and a skillful workman and a weaver in blue and in purple and in scarlet material, and fine linen. All the gold that was used for the work, in all the work of the sanctuary, even the gold of the wave offering, was 29 talents and 730 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. The silver of those of the congregation who were numbered was 100 talents and 1,775 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary; a beka a head (that is, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary), for each one who passed over to those who were numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men. The hundred talents of silver were for casting the sockets of the sanctuary and the sockets of the veil; one hundred sockets for the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. Of the 1,775 shekels, he made hooks for the pillars and overlaid their tops and made bands for them. The bronze of the wave offering was 70 talents and 2,400 shekels. With it he made the sockets to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and the bronze altar and its bronze grating, and all the utensils of the altar, and the sockets of the court all around and the sockets of the gate of the court, and all the pegs of the tabernacle and all the pegs of the court all around.

Amen. Thus far the reading of God's word. Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for this Your Word and as we begin to study it tonight, we ask again that you would give us hearing ears and seeing eyes to behold the wonderful truth of Your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Now, Exodus 38 and 39 continue reviewing the implementation of the instructions that God had given to Moses about the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 through 31. And just like the passages that we looked at last week, there are really very few verbal changes, especially when we read, in just a few moments, the first 31 verses of chapter 39. It is almost a verbatim repetition of the instructions of chapter 28 with a few very logical explainable omissions and with the change of the verbs. Whereas the verbs in chapter 28 commanded Moses to command the people to do certain things, the verbs in chapter 38 and 39 indicate the carrying out of those particular commands. So, we have here verbal parallels between two sections of Exodus. You will have already noticed the repetition of the phrase, "Just as the Lord had commanded Moses." When we read chapter 39, you're going to see it repeated seven times just in the section that we're going to read from verses 1-31. It's repeated like a mantra, and indeed, as we've already seen, the material in chapter 35-39, as a whole, duplicates God's instructions in chapters 25-31 precisely to make that point. That the children of Israel were this time doing exactly as God had commanded them to do. Now, a study of this chapter, as a whole, reminds us that the worship of the true God is always initiated by Him. True worship is responding to what God has called us to do, God has told us to do. So, in Exodus 28, Moses is responding to what God has called us to do, God has told us to do. And so, in Exodus 28, he initiates the instruction for the priestly garments, and in Exodus 39, His instructions are implemented in obedience to His commands. He tells us how to worship Him in detail, and then our duty is to respond in accordance to His will.

### **I. The gifts of the people are an expression of how seriously the people took God's grace and presence.**

So, let's look first at this section here in Exodus 38, verse 21-31 where we have an account of the material cost of the tabernacle. Here we see that the gifts of the people are an expression of how seriously the people took God's grace and presence. You see what's happening in verses 21-31, the statistics of the tabernacle are now given. We're told how much gold and silver and bronze was given towards the building of the tabernacle, but we're not only told generically how much was given; we're told how it was used. It's almost an accountability structure to the people. The people have given all of this precious metal, and now, Moses is going to say, "Let me tell you how what you gave was used." Even to the point of telling them how much silver it took to make those sockets. So that the people of God would know that the Levites and Moses weren't getting rich off of their offerings to the tabernacle. It's like, "Friends, you gave this amount, and let me tell you how this amount was used. We used it this way; we used it that

way; we used this much to make this; we used this much to make that.” So we see here something of accountability.

There's no parallel, by the way, of this material with earlier material. Of course, there couldn't be because Moses didn't know how much was going to be given and he didn't know how it was going to be deployed until it was given. So this section is without parallel in chapters 25-31. But what we're seeing here is an example of faithful stewardship. The people of God have given; they've been faithful in their stewardship, but now, the people who had been entrusted with the task of building the tabernacle now report back to them and say, “Now, here's how we utilized what you gave. We were faithful with your faithful stewardship.”

I've already had an inquiring mind ask, “What exactly is a shekel of a sanctuary?” Well, the shekel of the sanctuary apparently indicates that there was actually a weight and measure of the sanctuary that determined how much a shekel was. In the old days, as you remember, the way that you determined weights and measures was that you went to the city and there was a weighing mechanism there and it was the official measurement for what a bushel was or what a particular unit of measure was. This was apparently the shekel of the sanctuary was weighed according to a particular measure, and so it is spoken of throughout this passage.

There is one very interesting phrase that is used. If you'll look at verse 21, it's only used here in the Book of Exodus, and only in three other places anywhere in the Bible. It's the way that the tabernacle is referred to. This is the number of things for the tabernacle. And then it's called “the tabernacle of the testimony.” Now, this is the only place that it is called this in Exodus. It is called this three times in the Book of Numbers. In Numbers 1:50; 53, and in Numbers 10:11, it is called the tabernacle of testimony. What does that title for the tabernacle mean? You'll remember that the ark is sometimes called this, the ark of the testimony. Sometimes it's called the Ark of the Covenant, other times it's called the ark of the testimony.

The point is that the tent, the tabernacle itself testified, pointed to, displayed the covenant relationship between God and Israel. It was a visible reminder of the covenant relationship and the presence of God with His people. It was the instrument whereby His people would experience His favorable presence in the covenant relationship, so it's called the tabernacle of the tent of testimony. Now, when you read through these massive amounts of numbers, you're immediately struck by the amount of wealth given by a people that had just been freed from slavery, a ton of gold, four tons of silver, three tons of bronze. And when we hear that, we're immediately reminded of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with the expensive oil. Those who have been forgiven much love much, and those who long for communion manifest it in their kingdom giving, and these people did. They had been forgiven much. They understood that they should have been judged and left in the wilderness to die, and yet God in His mercy spared them

and agreed to continue in relationship with them. And their outpouring of gifts is an expression of their love for God and appreciation of His forgiveness.

Surely, there's a lesson for us here about the costliness of communion. If there's no forgiveness without atonement, so also there's no worship without personal cost, and David knew that and in 2 Samuel he once said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord that cost me nothing." The occasion of that was when God spared him when he sinned, and immediately he said I'm going to worship God expensively, not to buy God's forgiveness, because God's forgiveness had already been given, but as a spontaneous expression of the heart of love because of God's forgiveness, I will not worship God if it costs me nothing. And that's a lesson sadly lost, surprisingly, on an affluent society.

An affluent society tends to be self-centered, and we see this even in church life. People are attracted to churches by promises of convenience. You remember the Florida church that advertised that they could get you in and out of the morning service in 21 minutes and on to the golf course for your 9:00 am "T time." Well, we tend to attract people that way. We're going to give you a full service provision of ministry according to your own preference. We'll give you the worship style you want. But God calls us to die to self and join with a community corporately devoted to the sacrificial support of the cause of God, and few in our own day think of offering a sacrifice to the Lord that really costs them, and this passage reminds us of the spontaneous and genuine response of someone who's really experienced the forgiveness of God. May God raise up a generation which worships Him without being begrudging in their time of worship, or in their personal resources in worship. If it's true that where our treasure is there our heart will also be, then what does our giving to the Lord and to His Church say about where our treasure is. What does it say about our hearts?

Ashby, one of the commentators on this Exodus passage says, "To us who live some three thousand years later, the quantity surveyor's analysis recorded here may seem irrelevant. The meaning of it is not irrelevant, though. God, the Creator and Rescuer, must be served with attention to every exact detail. The measurements are not merely intended to record a historical inventory but to give a message to succeeding generations: put all your energy and skills at the service of your God at all times."

## **II. The importance of divine directives and human obedience are manifested even in sartorial manufacture!**

Now in Exodus 39, we see the making of the priestly garments. Beginning in verse 32 there is the final accounting of what had been made and then Moses' blessing on it. We'll read the section that recounts the various pieces of priestly garments being made. This is God's word.

“Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet material, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He made the ephod of gold, and of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen. Then they hammered out gold sheets and cut them into threads to be woven in with the blue and the purple and the scarlet material, and the fine linen, the work of a skillful workman. They made attaching shoulder pieces for the ephod; it was attached at its two upper ends. The skillfully woven band which was on it was like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold and of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. They made the onyx stones, set in gold filigree settings; they were engraved like the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. The stones were corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they were twelve, corresponding to their names, engraved with the engravings of a signet, each with its name for the twelve tribes. They made on the breastpiece chains like cords, of twisted cordage work in pure gold. They made two gold filigree settings and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece. They made the tunics of finely woven linen for Aaron and his sons, and the turban of fine linen, and the decorated caps of fine linen, and the linen breeches of fine twisted linen, and the sash of fine twisted linen, and blue and purple and scarlet material, the work of the weaver, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and inscribed it like the engravings of a signet, "Holy to the LORD." They fastened a blue cord to it, to fasten it on the turban above, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed; and the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did. They brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its boards, its bars, and its pillars and its sockets; and the covering of rams' skins dyed red, and the covering of porpoise skins, and the screening veil; the ark of the testimony and its poles and the mercy seat; the table, all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the pure gold lampstand, with its arrangement of lamps and all its utensils, and the oil for the light; and the gold altar, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the veil for the doorway of the tent; the bronze altar and its bronze grating, its poles and all its utensils, the laver and its stand; the hangings for the court, its pillars and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords and its pegs and all the equipment for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; the woven garments for ministering in the holy place and the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests. So the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses. And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the LORD had commanded, this they had done. So Moses blessed them.”

We've already heard in the repetition, in verse 1,5,7,21,29 and 31, “just as the Lord had commanded Moses,” Exodus 39 reinforces one of the central themes of the book of Exodus, God alone determines how He is to be worshiped. He does

not ask His people how to creatively think up their own ways to approach Him, but instead carefully explains what they are to do. So, this phrase, “according to all the Lord had commanded Moses,” and “just as the Lord had commanded,” served to emphasize that point. Alan Cole in his commentary says this, “This sonorous refrain occurs seven times in this chapter, and seven times in the next. The deliberate intention of the repetition is made clear in stressing the exact and detailed obedience of Moses to every minute command of God.” And Matthew Henry goes on to say, “It is intimation to all the Lord's ministers to make the word of God their rule in all their ministrations and to act in observance of and obedience to the command of God.” This portion we've in Exodus 39 is paralleled in Exodus 28, and this principle of worshiping the Lord according to His command is part of the basis of the Reformer's stress of how we are to worship God in public worship; they called it the Regulative Principle. It was a special application of this principle for public worship, and they taught that the Church should only do in worship what God Himself warranted in His word. And that means that the elements of our worship services are to be drawn directly from God's word, preaching, prayer, praise, Scripture reading, sacraments and giving, and not from our own imaginations. This is one of the distinctives of the Reformed approach to worship.

Now, if you look at Exodus 35:3, you'll see a very interesting technical detail recorded by Moses. They hammered out gold sheets and cut them into threads to be woven in with the blue and the purple and the scarlet material and the fine linen, the work of a skilful workman. Have you tried to picture what that would have been like to do? It would have taken a skilful workman to do that. Well, this is very interesting because this technical detail reveals a practice that we know went on among very skilled weavers in Egypt. We know that this was done in Egypt at the time of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, so what we're seeing here is evidence of an Egyptian practice that further supports the historical accuracy of this whole account. If you were making this up, as many liberals say, in about 600 BC, there's no way that you could have remembered and known in the first place, that 800, 900, 1000 years before, people were doing this in Egypt. They were using this particular technique. And it makes perfect sense, that the children of Israel, having done a 430 year sojourn, would have known a little something about this particular technique in Egypt. At any rate, in verses 1-31, we see the priestly garments outlined and each of their details described. They are unique to the Old Testament form of worship. There's no New Testament parallel to these priestly garments. When any minister puts on a robe on Sunday morning, we're not trying to be like Old Testament priests. Our robes are plain and black, and the point of those robes is not to draw your attention to them, but to actually take your attention away from us so you're not thinking, “Oh, that is an ugly tie he has on today,” or “Man, he needs to get a new suit.” The whole point of the robe is to keep you from looking at what we're wearing. On the contrary, there was all manner of symbolism wrapped up in the garment that the priest was wearing, because your attention was to be focused on him for in one sense he was you. The priest was doing what he was doing in

your place. The minister isn't doing that; the minister is there to help you do what only you can do in the worship of God, and that is worship God. He's not doing it for you, but he's helping you to be able to do it. But the priest is acting on your behalf, so his clothes had all manner of symbolism in them that our clothes don't have in new covenant worship. Matthew Henry has a beautiful statement about this. Let me share it with you. "These garments in conformity to the rest of the furniture of the tabernacle, were very rich and splendid. The Church, in its infancy, was thus taught, thus pleased with the rudiments of this world, but now, under the gospel, which is the ministration of the Spirit, to effect and impose such pompous habits as some churches do under the pretense of decency and instruction, is to betray the liberty with which Christ has made us free and to entangle the Church again in the bondage of those carnal ordinances that were imposed only until a time of reformation. These were all shadows of good things to come, but the substance is Christ, and the grace of the gospel, and now that the substance has come, it is jest to be fond of the shadow."

So, why is that we don't have rich liturgical garments used in the worship service of First Presbyterian Church? Because Jesus has fulfilled that symbolism. And in the simplicity of gospel worship, our worship is totally on Jesus. No human intermediary now serves as the visible symbol of His presence and His completion of the sacrificial system. Our eyes are on Jesus who has completed this.

Now, in verse 30, there is this very interesting ascription that is put on the priest's turban. It says, "Holy to the Lord." The priest, the whole tabernacle, is set apart to the Lord, that is, holy to the Lord, given over to the Lord, and this is one of the most important points about the tabernacle and its service. So, it is written on the high priest's crown as a permanent testimony. There are two applications that come from this. First, what this teaches us about our worship. We are called to holiness, especially to worship the Lord in holiness, to adorn ourselves in the worship of the Lord in holiness. 1 Chronicles 16:29 reminds us to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," 2 Chronicles 20:21 commands us to "praise the Lord in the beauty of Holiness," Psalm 29:2 says to "give to the Lord the glory due to His name, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," or Psalm 96:9, "worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness." True believers are spiritual priests, as it were, and the linen of our service is the linen of holiness, so the holiness to the Lord on our foreheads is in fact the life. "Who may dwell in the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." We worship the Lord with the beauty of holiness.

But ultimately, you see, it points to Jesus, because Jesus fulfills the realities typified in the tabernacle and the garments of the priests and the high priest's medallion. Jesus is the whole high priestly line and, indeed, all of Israel, all the people of God reduced to one. He is the one who is holy to the Lord, He's the one who is holy to the Lord in our place, and He offers that sacrifice of holiness in our place in His redemption. Again, Matthew Henry says, "Christ is our great high

priest. When He undertook the work of our redemption, He put on the clothes of service, He arrayed Himself with the gifts and graces of the Spirit which He received not by measure. He girded Himself with the girdle of resolution to go through with His undertaking. He charged Himself with God's spiritual Israel, bore them on His shoulders, carried them in His bosom, laid them near His heart, engraved them on the palms of His hands, and presented them in the breastplate of judgment to His Father. And lastly, He crowned Himself with holiness to the Lord, consecrating His who undertaking to the honor of His Father's holiness, now consider how great this Man is." You may remember Hebrews 5, that "He as our great high priest interceded and He was heard," why? "Because of His piety." We're not heard because of our piety. God wants us to worship in holiness, but we're heard because of Jesus, and He was heard because of His holiness. His holiness demanded a hearing, and His holiness brings us into God's presence, and He Himself, in one person, fulfills all the symbolism of this great tabernacle system. So, it is not to the ceremony that we run, but we run to Jesus that we might be ushered into the presence of God. Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, teach us of Christ through Your tabernacle, and thus glorify Him, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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