

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS.

A Sermon

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“An holy priesthood.”—1 Peter ii. 5.

In this epistle Peter is speaking of the scattered saints in all parts of the world, and, taught by the Holy Spirit, he says of them that they were “an holy priesthood.” He is not talking about ministers: he is not speaking of a certain number of men who have passed through divers grades of office, and are thereby qualified to wear robes of a certain colour, but he is speaking of every believer, and he calls every saint a member of “an holy priesthood.” Every Mary and every John, every peasant girl and every labourer that puts his hand upon the plough, every servant of God in every capacity, is a member of this “holy priesthood”: at least so Peter says, and Peter was not mistaken, for he spake as he was “moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Let us for the ten-thousandth time state our own solemn conviction, that it is time for England to wake up, and solemnly rebuke the priestcraft that seems rising up in our midst. No man has any right to call himself, in any exclusive sense, a priest. When I take down the Book of Common Prayer and read “Then shall the priest say,” I shut it up again with detestation. And if it were the best human book ever printed and had no other blunder and error in it, yet if it ventured to call any class of men priests, I should denounce it as being tainted with Romanism. Christ is the only priest who can offer sacrifice for the expiation of sin. He is “the Great Apostle and High Priest of our profession.” But there is

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another priesthood—one of offering prayers and praises, and this belongs not to me because I am a minister, nor to any number of men who are called "Reverend," or "Very Reverend," or Right-Reverend," but to you as well, and to every one else who by faith has believed in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. If truly converted to God, a man though scarce able to read his Bible, is a priest unto him, because he has a new heart and a right spirit. He may never mount a pulpit, nor preside at a church-meeting: but he may be a priest unto God. His only pulpit may be a cobbler's stall: his only platform for witnessing to Christ may be behind the counter or in the factory, but he is a priest for all that.

Or if the Lord call a sister to himself, she is to be silent in the church-meeting, but she belongs to the Divine priesthood, and her prayers and praises will go up with as much acceptance before God, through Jesus Christ, as if she were an eminent divine, or the most gifted of the saints. All God's children are priests, and this is the song of all in heaven and all on earth who are truly saved. "He hath made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign for ever and ever."

Now, it is on this theme of priesthood that I desire to speak to-night; and the way in which priests were made under the law is described for us in the 8th chapter of Leviticus. So I invite you to turn with me and look at the subject as expounded there; for surely the way in which the sons of Aaron were ordained to their earthly and temporal priesthood is richly suggestive, and intentionally typical of the manner in which God calls all his people to their holy priesthood. On turning to that chapter we find that one of the first things with regard to the ordination of Aaron and his sons to their priesthood was that, **THEY WERE CLEANSED**. We read in Leviticus viii. 6, and *Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.* That was one cleansing. But several times in the chapter we find that a second cleansing was theirs and that by blood! In verse 2 we find that they brought a bullock for a sin-offering, and two rams, and with the blood of one of the rams, and the blood of the sin-offering they sprinkled, that they might be clean before God. This powerfully teaches that every one of us aspiring to be a priest for God must first be cleansed, and that with a double purifying.

"Let the water and the blood,
From his riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse us from its guilt and power."

If we look closer into this cleansing by blood we see that Aaron and his sons put their hands upon the ram, confessing their sins. Then the ram was slain, the blood sprinkled upon the altar, and the laver, and upon all the vessels of the sanctuary, and then upon Aaron and his sons. What deep instruction is here! If we are

God's priests we lay our hand upon Christ, accept him as our substitute, trusting in that blood shed for the remission of sins. He will have no priests in his sanctuary who have not been cleansed with the blood of Christ. All service until this is experienced is a vain oblation, which he cannot accept. Go to the altar, confess thy sin, and lay it upon the Lamb of God, and then, but not until then, canst thou be a holy priest.

Moreover, the priests were afterward also washed in water. On this first occasion they were cleansed from head to foot: but on later occasions when going into the tabernacle, they needed only to wash their hands and feet. So is it with our Christian life. By the Holy Spirit's application of our Lord's merits believers are completely cleansed, and there remains neither spot nor wrinkle on their acceptance with him. But though a man may be perfectly clean who leaves his bath, yet his feet may be soiled as he goes to his room and he needs again to wash them. So you and I need to pray, "Forgive us our sins," though they have all been forgiven. We are washed, but daily defiling calls for constant cleansing. Though every true Christian has been cleansed, as was Peter, he must not say, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." When Jesus comes by his cleansing word and spirit, and girt with the towel and carrying the basin, we must be willing to let him cleanse, nay, beg him to wash our feet, that we may be clean, every whit. We do need to pray "Forgive us our sins." It is not in the least in conflict with the doctrine of a complete sanctification, or complete justification.

The priests, every one of them, were washed, they had a clear right to go into the sanctuary; yet none the less, they must wash their hands and feet each time they entered.

So we are clean; God accepts us; we are his children and yet, day by day, we must go with the prayer to him, "Lord cleanse me again in the Redeemer's Blood: make me pure by the washing of water by the Word!" So if defiling come, his cleansing power may be proved again and again.

Well, beloved, have we ever attempted to serve God without this cleansing? If so, may we repent of our imagined righteousness as much as of our sins: for even our righteousnesses are nothing but sins until we have been washed. Do we long for this perfect cleansing? The fountain is full: the blood, the water, have the same efficacy as they ever had. "Though *your* sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Step down into this heavenly bath. Trust Christ to save you, and being cleansed by him, you shall be forever a member of this "holy priesthood."

Referring again to Leviticus viii., we see that the second thing in the ordaining of the priesthood was, THEY WERE DIVINELY CLOTHED. However clean they were, they must be suitably arrayed, or they cannot appear before the Lord. We have given to us, a list of the garments, and find that Aaron as High Priest was sumptuously clothed, but not so his sons. In the 13th verse we are told that

they had coats, and girdles, and bonnets. Let us glance at each of these for they are packed with spiritual significance. *The "Coat"* is a priestly robe. Everyone who ministered at the altar put on an ephod, a coat hanging from the shoulder, generally in one piece, and woven from the top throughout, like that which the Lord Jesus wore. So every believer is to put on the imputed righteousness of Jesus, given to us at our conversion.

He officiates as High Priest before the throne clothed in white linen, and so do all the saints—"white linen which is the righteousness of the saints," says John in the Revelation. Now we have no righteousness of our own, but the voice from heaven speaks, "I counsel thee, buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed." We come to Christ just as we are, and he clothes us with his righteousness, active and passive, and this is the ephod in which we minister unto God. With our Lord's righteousness clothing us, we can stand without fear before the awful searching eyes of God, now and hereafter and not fear.

"Bold shall I stand at that great day,
For who sought to my charge shall lay,
While through thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?"

Are you, beloved, robed in the righteousness of your Saviour? Then come forward, and officiate as his priest!

Next to the ephod, came *the girdle*. In the case of Aaron we are told it was a "curious" girdle. Ah! how curious, how matchless, how marvellous is the girdle which encircles the loins of Christ! He is girt about the waist with a golden girdle. His faithfulness, his truth, his love, his every attribute of excellency combined, make up this curious girdle comprising the ephod. But every other true priest has his girdle. You and I, if called to this holy office, are to have our loins girt about, standing always ready, instant to obey God's command, and revel in his service. Orientals wore flowing garments and when these were loose they could not hasten in their activities. So they used the girdle to brace themselves, gathering up their robes for special labour, or conflict, or fight. So every priest of Christ must wear his girdle of faithfulness. There is a wicked world always on the watch. Be careful: be vigilant. You may be tripped up by the sin that doth so easily heseñ us. See to it that you are well braced, so that if the enemy come suddenly you may meet him with courage, or if a message come from your master you may run upon it with diligence.

Yet another part of the priest's clothing is called "the bonnet"; literally, *the turban*. This, so we are told, "was for glory and for beauty." Truly our Lord has put upon his people his own glory and beauty. We are not merely acceptable, but beloved: not passable, but admirable: not merely not to be condemned, but full of imparted loveliness. Jesus says to every saved soul, "Thou hast ravished my heart—my sister, my spouse—with one

look of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Jesus so falls in love with his own image in each saved soul, that his heart is captured. Here is "the glory and beauty" with which he has invested us. Every believer is looked upon by God as if he were Christ. Christ took your place, and was cursed for you; you take Christ's place, and notwithstanding all the blemishes, all the backslidings, all the hardness you may feel within, if you are truly in Christ, you are so clothed that glory and beauty, and that Divine, is yours! The priests were not only washed but clothed. My soul, what joy is this! Ponder it, until it masters and enthrals thee!

After the cleansing and clothing, came this to the priests, **THEY WERE ANOINTED**. This is mentioned more than once. Aaron had the holy oil poured upon his head, until it ran down to the skirt of his garment. So Jesus was anointed of the Holy Spirit without measure. The other priests were also touched with the oil—sprinkled with it.

And you and I, if we have been both washed and clothed, must yet be anointed. Child of God, dost thou distinctly and intensely recognise thy need of this anointing? If I have preached without the Holy Spirit I have preached in vain. If I have gone to my prayer-chamber, no matter how earnest I desired to be, I have prayed in vain unless the Spirit of God has been upon me. This anointing is the Christian's supreme need. Dear Joseph Irons very often used to say as he went into the pulpit, "Oh! for an unction from on high!" Sunday-school teacher, you are a priest: and this is your great want—anointing. You who preach in the streets, you who are intercessors in private for Christ, you who seek to show God in your daily life, you need the anointing. What can we not do when the Spirit is in us: What can we do if he is withholding his presence and power? As God's priests we may, we must, have a daily unction—anointing—from the Holy One!

After this, **THEY WERE CONSECRATED**. Here I must enlarge more than upon the last point. This setting apart to priestly function and work was very remarkable. We find that blood was taken, and that Moses touched the priests with it (according to the 24th verse) first "upon the tip of the right ear, then upon the thumb of their right hand and then upon the great toes of their right feet; and Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about." This description is very full and suggestive. Every Christian is to be consecrated to God by blood as to *his ear*. That is, we are to be eager to hear God's voice, whether in his Word printed or preached. "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound!" They only recognise it because the blood is on the ear. We are to hear God's voice in providence. When there is a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees, like David, we are to bestir ourselves. We are to be willing to hear even the rod and him that hath appointed it. There are many voices that the sanctified ear detects that the carnal ear has never listened to. The godly man has monitions from the Most High when the natural man

catches no whisper. To hear the "still, small voice" always, is the listening we should desire. So too, with regard to man, we should hear his misery and feel for it: hear his sin, and pray to God for its full forgiveness as Jesus did. Yet on the other hand, there are some sounds that the ear so consecrated must not hear. We are to be deaf to the insinuations of suspicion, the slander of calumny, aye! to many an intended insult that else might have provoked and angered us. May we ever feel that as there was blood on the priest's ear, so all our receptive powers are to be consecrated to God. If so, I shall feel that there are some books I cannot read: for I have blood on my ear: some songs I dare not listen to: some talk I dare not share in, for I have a consecrated ear. I am to use *that* for him, for I am his priest.

Next in order, was *the thumb*. This consecrated the hand. And as the ear stands for our receptive faculties, so the hand represents our active powers. There are some things we must not touch nor handle: some things we cannot do, in which we can have no hand, nay, cannot finger. Since our hand is sanctified by the blood, all it does must be pleasing to God. I know that a common mistake is to think that you cannot serve God unless you get into a pulpit, or attend a prayer-meeting. Nonsense! You can truly serve God behind the counter, in the work-room—serve God by digging a ditch, or clipping a hedge. I believe that God is often served by the tailor or shoemaker who is conscientious in his calling, quite as well as by bishops and archbishops, or by men of any church in the world. At any rate, if you cannot serve God in all that you do, you have need to ask to be taught the secret of the Christian life: for that secret is, the consecration of everything to Jesus Christ.

You are to make your garments vestments, your meals sacraments, your every day a holy day, your every hour a consecrated season unto God. Our hand, with all its manifold activities, is to be consecrated—blood-marked—to him.

After this, came *the foot*. The blood was put on the great toe of the right foot, so the feet were set apart for God. Ah! these legs of ours used to carry us to theatres! We could run fast enough the downward road with them. I recollect a man who would stand in the aisle for a long time—he said he would "serve his legs out"; they had served the devil so long, that they should bear a little hardship for his new lord and master, Jesus Christ. I know some of you, who used to walk many miles to come to the house of God—six miles. I used to say to you that it was too far. It was not too far for you then, but lately it has become much too far. The road has not grown longer, but you have gone backward as to your zeal, and when the zeal declines, the miles get dolefully long. But I have marked that when men and women are in a right state of mind and soul, it does not matter how far they walk, nor what they have to do for Christ, the consecrated foot can do it joyfully. If I have a consecrated foot, I must not let it take me into bad company. If anybody say to you, "Can you come with me to such

and such a place?" You must answer, "No! I cannot: I have a foot that won't go, and I cannot go without that!" And if any should say, "What is the matter with your foot?" say, "I have a foot that has blood upon it!" They will say: "Strange!" They will not understand you: but if you attempt to explain to them that the blood of your Lord Jesus Christ bought you and so, your foot, then they will understand that it cannot go anywhere except where Christ would have it go. It may mean that you will have to change your position in life—you have to move, and have a choice as to where you shall go. Make that choice on the principle of having a consecrated foot. Do not go where you cannot hear the pure Word of God. A Jew heard of a good business where there was much money but no synagogue; and of another where there was a synagogue though but little trade, and being a pious Jew, he chose the place with the synagogue. I am afraid that there are but few Jews who would do that: and quite as few Christians who think first of God's house and the hearing of the Gospel. Better to have a dinner of herbs and the Gospel with it, than a stalled ox and not to listen to the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In choosing your home, in fact, in everything that concerns your progress in life, act as if you had, and knew you had, a consecrated foot!

Gathering up all, it surely teaches that a Christian is always, and everywhere, and altogether, not his own, but consecrated to Christ. Not merely to be baptized, to come once a month to the Lord's table: to take a pew, and sit and look so heavenly-minded. Any hypocrite can do that. But it is the mark of a Christian to be so honest, upright, charitable, kind, Christlike, holy, that all who see may be compelled to say, "That man differs from other men." The secret, though they may not discover it, is, that whilst other men are but common men, where father Adam left them in the fall, this man has been found, and made anew in Jesus Christ. Ear, thumb, and foot, all consecrated to Christ's service!

Hastily running through the rest of this chapter (Leviticus viii.) we observe that *the consecration was very thorough*. There is mention made of unleavened bread. This teaches, that a Christian is not to follow religion for the sake of honour, gain, or fame. None of the leaven of hypocrisy, or mere formalism, is to be tolerated. We are to serve Christ for Christ's sake, and follow God because our heart is right with him.

Again, the consecration is set forth—though I have little time to notice it—by the different parts of the victim being offered to God. You will observe that the deepest feelings of the Christian are to be with God—that the inwards and the fat of the kidneys were to be burnt upon the altar. Thus the richest and fullest emotions of the Christian's mind and heart are to belong to God, for the fat and marrow were to be burned as well: and the Christian's greatest strength is to be the Lord's: for the right shoulder was to be offered as a wave offering, and then to be consumed with fire. We are to give God our inmost thoughts, our deeper passions, our greatest strength. "Blessed is the man whose

strength is in thee!" Some people can call loud enough to wake up a town when they are in their business, but when they come to pray you can scarcely hear them. But I would have a Christian never so much, or so fine a man, as when he is serving God. Give the world, if you will, the rag-ends of your mind, soul and strength: but give God your whole man, your inward and your outward life, every part and power and passion, strung to its greatest height, and all devoted to him!

But to conclude once more, *the Christian's consecration is to be constant.* This remarkable chapter has greatly interested me in observing that these priests were to be for one whole week officiating in the tabernacle. They were not either by day or night to leave their holy work. How they found strength enough, or whether this really included absolutely necessary seasons of rest, I cannot tell. But it says: that for seven days they were to serve without intermission both by day and night. So the Christian priesthood is to be perpetual. We are never to cease to serve God. You have heard of one that was so in love, that he did eat, and drink, and sleep for such an one: so the Christian is to "do all to the glory of God." Says one, "Can this be done? Are we to follow Romish monks and get into a monastery?" No! I have no doubt they are right in shaving their heads: there is probably a great necessity for it. But unless we become demented, there is no need for us to imitate their example. The Christian is not to shut himself up, and become a hermit, and think that thereby he can cultivate holiness. That is unholiness: Christian holiness is social: the light of the world, the salt of the earth. We are to be in the world, though not of it; our priesthood exercised in the street, the shop, the family, and at the fireside. By day and night, to offer up prayers and praises and thanksgivings unto God, and so be perpetually a priest.

But what am I talking about? There are some here that have never yet been priests to God. What have they been doing to-day? Why even on God's holy day they do not serve him, but themselves. Why, Sir! God has never reaped a solitary ear of grain from your field. Take care lest having lived to yourself, you die to yourself, having lived without God, you die without God, and find it a tremendous thing to stand and be judged without a Saviour to be your helper, or interceding priest. I say nothing to you about being a priest to God. You need a priest for yourself, first. Do not go to any man. No man has power to help your soul, except to pray and plead for you. The saving, pardoning power lies only with Jesus Christ. Look away to him: he died: trust in his sacrifice: he rose, he ascended: he is standing at God's right hand. There is life for a look at him. Look! trust! and you shall then be cleansed, clothed, anointed, consecrated, and so serve God. But your first business is to go to Christ. Oh! may Christ come to you, and save you now, and he shall have glory out of us, world without end! Amen.