

The Priesthood Of God (Part 7)

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I have been opening each of these last three sermons in this series with several minutes of devoted to holiness, because in one word it is a major objective of the training that we are involved in. With that remark, I want you to turn with me to Revelation 15, where God makes a very interesting statement regarding His own holiness.

Revelation 15:3-4 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You. For Your judgments have been manifested."

In the highest sense, God says that He alone is holy. And there is a reason for this. It is because only He is absolutely good. We are going to go to place where Jesus confirms this—in the book of Luke, chapter 18. I know you are going to recognize this situation immediately.

Luke 18:18-19 Now a certain ruler asked Him saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

So when a man called Jesus good, Jesus turned that right around and said, "*No* [basically that is what He said], *there is none good but God.*"

There is a direct connection between holiness and goodness. Everything about our God is good. He is morally excellent, virtuous, righteous, honorable, generous, loving, kind, and reliable. He is wise and just. He is appropriate in every judgment that He makes.

By way of contrast, everybody in this world, including us, is defiled to some degree compared to the standard God is in Himself, His attributes, and in all of His activities. He is perfectly good. By comparison, Isaiah says (regarding himself and other men) that we are all as filthy rags and of unclean lips.

The very fact of God's perfect goodness demands from you and me the utmost of veneration, because this is what we are pursuing after—to be good as He is good. As we pursue this by degrees, we become more holy.

The term holy indicates difference or separation from others—that is the meaning of the word. Holiness is in reality a reaction against the evil of this world. It is moral and spiritual movement in one's life, in attitude and in conduct. It is a withdrawing, a separating, from the evil in this world; so that in actual day to day conduct, we are in alignment with God's goodness. And in that sense—it may seem radical to you—if there was no evil, there would be no holiness. Now, how can that be? Why? Because there would be no evil to separate from.

By declaring Himself holy, God thus declares His difference and His separateness from mankind.

There is a great deal of detail contained within that separateness. We are not going to go into those details at this point. I just want you to understand this general difference that there is between God and all others. He is different because He is holy; He is different because He is absolute goodness. We cannot rise to that.

But that is the direction that we are to go in with our lives—to be good as God is good. I can guarantee you, as we become good as God is good, we are separating from the world, and we are becoming holy. That is a simple explanation that anybody ought to be able to understand so that you can nail down what holiness is.

It is really not vague at all, once we begin to see what makes God different—why He is holy. There is not a drop of evil in Him. He is completely separate from it; that is the direction that we are to go in, because God tells us what goodness is, in His word.

So men are made holy in so far as they are vessels of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, Christians are especially holy because they are vessels of the Holy Spirit and they are consecrated to God's service. These are people who are conforming to the law of God. The law tells us what is good and what is bad. It is interesting that the apostle Paul said in Romans 7:12—this ought to be a scripture we can have in our minds because the numbers are so good. Romans 7:12 where Paul says, "The law is holy, just, and good."

We become holy by allowing ourselves to be used by God to separate from evil, thus becoming good.

Holiness is the noun form of holy. As applied to a person, holiness is the state or quality of being God-like. It is having God-like perspectives, attitudes, conduct, and judgment. This is what we are to grow into: to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is a challenge. But it is the challenge that God sets before us.

We are never in this life going to reach that pinnacle. But nonetheless, it is the goal that God sets before us.

God tells us right out that He has, generally, called the weak of the world (I Corinthians 1). The "weak of the world" means that He has called people with many problems; not only many problems, but also having little power to solve and overcome those problems. We learn this as we go along—how weak we actually are.

There are people with attitude problems and laziness problems. Others have health problems, insecurity problems, and anger problems. There are the narcissists who want to control and manipulate everything to their advantage. There are the "holier than thou's" who can barely stand somebody that they think has a problem and thus they want to scornfully flee from them.

God has put together such an eclectic mix, and yet He has done it. He has thrown us together to learn not to just humbly get along, but to actually love one another to the same measure that Christ loves us.

This, brethren, may be the single biggest challenge that we are facing in this life—to come to love our brethren.

In the Worldwide Church of God, the congregations were large enough that we did not have to face many of these problems. If we had a problem with someone, we could just associate with someone else. The congregations were large enough that we did not have to solve it.

I sincerely believe that that is one of the reasons that God blew the Worldwide Church of God apart. It is almost like He said, "*You are going to get along or else. And I am going to put you in small enough congregations that you will not be able to dodge these issues if you want to stay in the church*."

I am not suggesting, by what I just said, that all of our differences can be perfectly resolved. But it does set up the conditions where if we really do love God and His way, we then have the opportunity to make the effort to overcome our own self righteousness and to love that other person, though we may consider them our enemy.

We are to become a real brother or sister to that person. It is quite a challenge. But that is the challenge of preparing for the priesthood.

In the previous, sermon we got to the place where the symbolism of the high priest's clothing was being explained. The symbolism is a treasure trove of what the righteousness, manner, way, character, and attitudes of Jesus Christ are—summed up by the word character. It shows to us in symbolic ways what God wants us to aim for.

One thing we have to understand is that the high priest, under the Old Covenant, serving at the Tabernacle or Temple, merely had to wear the symbols. It says nothing about his own character. We are concentrating here on the symbols of the clothing he had to wear, but Jesus actually had the character—I mean that is the way He was, as symbolized by the clothing.

The white breeches were mentioned. They were underclothing. That is what they were. We also discussed the ankle length tunic or coat that the high priest had to wear and also the girdle. These three things—breeches, coat, and the girdle—were right against the high priest's skin. Together, all three of them represented that Jesus Christ was righteous from the inside out. Even though you could not see it with your eyes, He was nonetheless righteous.

We will learn in just a minute that there was one part of the underclothing that could be seen. Very interestingly, it was around the ankles—all the way at the bottom. So anyway you want to look at this...if you look at him and examine the clothing he is wearing from the inside out, he was righteous.

If you are looking at him from the bottom up, from his feet to his head, you start out with his righteousness. And we begin to get a picture of the first thing that God demands of us: we must be righteous! This is just the bare keeping of the Commandments of God, because it forms the foundation for everything else.

I want to add something to this. None of us on our own qualify for this. So what God, in His mercy and by His grace, has done is permit Himself a legal act by which He accepts our weak faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, in His sacrifice. Because we have declared this before God, and because we have begun to make a turn in our lives and are beginning to keep His commandments, He will then

impute—account—to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is as though we are clothed with it, although it is simply by a legal act that it is done. Thus we are aligned with the law of God that opens the way for us to serve Him in this manner.

We are going to go into this a bit further. I want you to turn first of all to I Peter. We were just getting started on this in the last sermon. We had arrived at the place where we were finishing up talking about the coat and had moved on to the girdle.

I Peter 1:13-15 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

We are going to look first at the word "gird." It is the verbal root of the term "girdle." To "gird" means to surround or to encircle. This girdle surrounded the waist over the tunic but under the robe. The girdle was not visible from the outside in because it was completely covered by the robe. But it was nonetheless there. Thus, like the breeches, no part of this was ever seen while the high priest was serving.

The noun form of that verb is "girdle." It might be translated in your Bible as "sash" or "belt." Remember "gird" means to go around. So a girdle is something that goes around; in this case, it was something that went around the waist.

A girdle was an instrument, a piece of clothing, in which other things were attached to. A girdle, then, was a device that held things in place, making them ready for use.

Thus—when we get to the symbolism—a girdle is a symbol that pictures readiness for vigorous, active service, because it holds things together so they are not flopping all over the place. If you were a worker and things were flopping all over the place, you would be in trouble.

You have probably seen that workmen, like an electrician, will have a belt on; and on that belt, things will be attached that are kept handy so that he is freed to work with his hands regardless of where he is.

So how do we apply this to the service of a priest? In Hebrews 7, we have an example from our Savior, who is our High Priest.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He [Christ] is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives [He is spoken of as being resurrected and in heaven] to make intercession for them.

There is His job—one of His major jobs—and He is always on the job. He is always ready to serve, to intercede. And interceding is a major portion of His service to you and me.

Back to I Peter 1. We will be talking about verse 14, primarily, because now Peter is going to tell us how to gird ourselves as we pursue holiness so that we, too, are ever ready for service. In an overall sense, it is by not allowing the mind to become cluttered with mental junk. In today's world, what Peter is saying, in verse 14, is "Be focused." See that?

I Peter 1:14 ...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance.

Keep focused on the Kingdom of God; keep focused on those things that pertain to our salvation and to serving Christ.

When we put these two verses together, Peter is giving you and me this advice: "Be sober, serious minded, self controlled, pay attention to business, be alert to our relationship to God, keep our mind free of the rashness and confusion of this world." So he urges us to focus on our hope.

Look at verse 13 again:

I Peter 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and REST YOUR HOPE FULLY [be focused] upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now one thing that we can add to this... It may not appear here in a great deal of strength, but this is where God's providence comes in. We keep our mind on the hope that God has put before us—to be resurrected into the Kingdom of God, into His family, fully and completely. And at the same time, do not fear that God will not supply. He will take care of it. He will never leave nor forsake us.

So frequently, though we might have our mind on the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we allow ourselves to get distracted, because our fears turn us away and we want to take care of business ourselves, in our way.

We are going to go back to the Old Testament, to Isaiah 11. We are still talking about the girdle and what it symbolizes. This is a little bit different angle, but it clues right in to the general theme.

Isaiah 11:4-5 But with righteousness He [Jesus Christ] shall judge the poor. And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth. And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt [if you have a King James Version it says "girdle," there] of His loins, and faithfulness the belt [or girdle or sash] of His waist.

This shows how Jesus Christ carries out His responsibilities to His brothers and sisters. His girdle symbolizes the fact that He has got it all together. And He is aware, He will deal with us in righteousness, and He will supply our needs.

So this girdle, like the coat, was covered by other garments, but it is always there—side by side, in cahoots with, joined with His righteousness. It also appears to be made of the same material of the coat, because the symbol of righteousness in the undergarments continues right on. The girdle's function was to, more or less, hold things neatly together.

Thus, God is showing us that Christ's righteousness keeps His judgments of all things on the right godly track. He will deal with all of us in a perfect balance of justice and mercy.

Now let us go to Hebrews 5. We are getting back to what I opened up with about holiness and getting along with one another, loving one another. Here is what it says a priest should do:

Hebrews 5:2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.

God is talking, here, not about Jesus Christ; He is talking about an ordinary priest. God expects this kind of conduct and attitude from a priest.

So a priest should be able to look at the problems that others have without ever forgetting His own weaknesses. God expects that to temper the person's response to those that are perceived as having problems. There is, in all of us, a natural tendency to be critical and hard on others. We are going to go back one chapter to Hebrews 4.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Christ overcame His own urgings to be hard on us. But He remembers His own fight, His own striving against sin, bad attitudes that may have come up in Him. How many times have we read in God's word, "Christ was moved to compassion"?

Now it is one of those things where it would have been, we will say, easy for Him to look down on people in a self-righteous manner. But He did not allow Himself to do that. He dealt with people, being able to read their minds, we might say, and look right into their heart, and still be compassionate towards them, knowing what that nature was like.

We shall be of little help to people unless we can learn to be sympathetic and empathetic toward them. Does not God tell us, command us, that we are to bear one another's burdens?

Let me add one more thing here. Being sympathetic and empathetic does not mean that we approve of the way they are doing things. Jesus knew very well that those people were wrong. So He could treat them very kindly, maybe heal them, pull them out of some desperate problem that they were in, knowing full well they did not deserve the help He was giving to them. They had not earned it.

But He helped them anyway. Do you know why? Not only was He compassionate, but He could look down the road to a time in the future and say, "I am going to see this person someday in My Kingdom. Then, what I did for them is really going to do them some good. It will probably be really humbling for them to recognize."

Let us go back to Exodus 28.

Exodus 28:31-35 You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. [We are switching garments here.] There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it does not tear. And upon its hem [down at the bottom] you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet [yarn], all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord and when he comes out, that he may not die.

The coat and the girdle were worn by the ordinary priest as well as the high priest. Symbolically, God is signaling that all priests must be righteous—that is the minimum requirement. The robe is the first item mentioned that is exclusively worn by the high priest.

The Scriptures state that the coat is expressly used for covering (as I mentioned before, down to the ankles). So not much of it is seen on the surface. The robe, though, in Scripture is worn to set the person off, to distinguish them from others and is thus a symbol of office and authority.

In our modern world soldiers, sailors, marines, police officers all wear uniforms. Why? To set them off from other people and to show their authority. It is something that is instantly recognized. So with the high priest that blue robe set him off from all others. It was a unique uniform that was worn in Israel only by him, because there were no other high priests. It was his uniform.

We are going to look at something in four scriptures. We are going to line them up just to give you a good picture of what a robe symbolizes. The first one is in I Samuel 24. We will just touch on these garments.

I Samuel 24:4 Then the men of David said to him, "This is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.'" And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

Now remember who Saul was. Saul was the King. He wore a robe that distinguished him from others. So when David cut off part of that robe and then later on showed it, everybody knew, everybody witnessed, that that piece of cloth came from the King's robe. Because the robe set him off.

This verse in Job 29 will give you some sort of an idea that Job was not just a "nobody." He was somebody in that community, in that nation that he was a part of. In verse 14, he is talking about himself:

Job 29:14 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban.

Apparently he was in such a position within his community, but he was probably a man, as the Bible says, who sat in the city gate. That is where judgments or community affairs or trials were held—right at the city gate. So it was open and transparent to all. In that job, he wore a robe. Judges wear robes. Usually in our nation they are black robes, but when they are judicious in a courtroom they have that robe on.

This is a prophecy in Ezekiel 26:

Ezekiel 26:16 Then all the princes of the sea will come down from their thrones, lay aside their robes, and take off their embroidered garments; they will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment, and be astonished at you.

I chose this scripture only to show you, again, that the high and the mighty, the great, wear robes (in this case princes is what God is referring to).

Let us go back to the New Testament and you will recognize this one right away.

Matthew 27:28-29 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

That is indeed what He was. He was King of the Jews. In order to mock Him, they put a scarlet robe on Him when He was at His weakest, and then they did their mocking. But, not until they put a robe on Him in recognition of what He claimed to be.

What can we learn from this? A robe dignifies a man for the office that he holds.

A very clear understanding of this can come from this. If a policeman is in plain clothes, you do not know for sure whether he really is a police man or not, even though he may proclaim loudly that he is and may even carry a gun. But, once the uniform is on him, you know at first sight.

So the robe identifies. It dignifies the man. It gives the man, it lends to the man, who is wearing it, that dignity. He may not deserve it. But nonetheless, that is what the robe does.

The high priest was robed for his office, over the white coat, down just below the knees, implying his position commanded respect. And indeed it did.

It is interesting on one occasion, Paul called the high priest a name (I cannot remember what the name was), but at any rate he spoke to him sharply and the guy whacked him in the jaw. Paul apologized right away. He said he had not recognized him as the high priest. Apparently he was not wearing his robe, and he just looked like an ordinary "Joe" Paul took him as an ordinary "Joe" and, *whack!* He paid for it because he was not an ordinary "Joe." He was the high priest. But, he did not have his robe on that identified him as what he was or Paul would have recognized it immediately. He would not have spoken to him with the disrespect that he did.

The high priest was robed for his office. I do not know whether you noticed it, but there was one other thing there. It is pretty clear in the Bible that the robes tended to be worn by people we would consider today to be royalty—people of either very high birth or at the very least by people of very high position.

This adornment feeds right in to the New Testament description of Jesus Christ supremely high position as our High Priest.

Turn with me back to the book of Hebrews again.

Hebrews 5:8-10 ...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek."

A very high office amongst the people of God...there cannot be a higher office than the one that He is holding. He is High Priest for the children of God.

In chapter 7, we will add to this.

Hebrews 7:1-3 For this Melchizedek [who was a type of Jesus Christ...notice the royalty here], king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning, "king of peace," without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

So the thread that goes through there is Melchizedek is a type of Jesus Christ. And Melchizedek was called in His day, king of righteousness and king of peace. Jesus Christ truly is "King of Righteousness" and "King of Peace."

An interesting thing regarding the robe is this: You probably cannot remember what we read it back in the book of Exodus (I believe it was in chapter 29), but at any rate God did not tell us what the robe was made of. It did not say, as He did with other things, that it was made of linen. It probably was. But He did not tell us that it was made of linen.

What He did say was that was blue. Very interesting...because His avoidance of the material makes one think about the color because that is what God had in mind. God did not overlook it. He wanted us to focus on the color, just as He did with the underclothing (they were pure white representing righteousness). The robe was blue.

It made, I am sure, a really interesting contrast between the white of the underclothing that showed through down around the ankles and the brilliant blue that was in the robe. This was how he was dressed so that he was easily recognizable.

Color really does not play a very large part in scripture. In fact, there are only five colors mentioned in the entirety of the Bible. They are purple, blue, scarlet, black, and white. Those are the only colors mentioned.

Dyes, I am sure, were very difficult to come by, and it is probable that they were probably also very expensive as well. Thus purple, blue, and scarlet materials at least suggest that anyone who had a colored robe was probably reasonably wealthy. If they were not wealthy, they probably had some power. But usually wealth and power go together.

Purple, scarlet, and blue colors dominate the materials used in the tabernacle and in the temple, when they were constructed, and also in their operations as well. The first time we have a color that is really brought forth outside of white is blue. That is going to be *the* dominant color that people are going to see at any time the high priest was carrying out his responsibility. *Blue*.

Besides the blue in the robe, blue was also the dominant color in the tabernacle. Blue was also the dominant color any time the tabernacle and the temple furniture (which Richard has been speaking about) were transported from one place to another—and that happened fairly often with the Israelites and the tabernacle. Guess what color they were all wrapped in?

Everything was taken down, wrapped, and covered by blue cloths. Whenever the Levites carried it, people would be always attracted to the blue cloth. There would be a steady stream of blue everywhere the person looked. You are probably getting the picture that the color blue means a lot to God, therefore it means a lot to you and me. It means a lot to God or He would not specifically have

required that all of those things be blue. So anytime these things were in operation or even transported, blue was going to attract the eye.

Now opinions vary, a little bit anyway, as to what the color blue suggests in this context. The first is because the sky is blue. Now think about that. Here in Columbia today, we have a grey, foreboding sky. Grey and black forebode that something is wrong.

Boy! When things are really going well outside, you have a weather high and that sky up there is "Carolina blue." Now there is a saying in North Carolina, "If God is a tarheel, then how come the sky is Carolina blue."

You know blue is a pleasant color. And God means well by choosing this color to attract your eye regarding the worship of Him. It is without a doubt one of the dominant colors in all of creation. Even the color itself, because the sky is blue, suggests something good, pleasant, and necessary.

Would you not like to live where you see blue skies often? I think if we lived in a place where the skies were gray or black all the time, we would go stir crazy. We would get cabin fever. But it is not that way with blue skies unless you are out in the desert and it never rains. We are not talking about that.

One of the opinions is this—I will give you this one, for what it is worth, and the other one as well. It is quite possible that both are intended by God. The first is it is the sky that separates us on earth from God. God is in heaven above, we are in earth beneath. So the conclusion from this is: the blue sky and all of the blue that you see around the tabernacle indicates separateness.

God is different! He is pleasant. He is wonderful. He is good. He is a blessing. But, brethren, He is different. He is holy! The blue suggests *that* difference to you and me. So it suggests a boundary between us and God.

The scripture that I want, in Hebrews 7, is one that I read before. I will just read it to you again.

Hebrews 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

Our Savior, our High Priest, is even higher than the heavens. And yet the heavens, that we are able to visually observe from any place we are on earth, is the farthest, biggest thing that our eyes can contain. He is different, and He is WAY above us. Yet He stoops to serve us constantly.

The second opinion is this: The blue represents grace. Again, the sky is brought into the picture in that it is grace that in reality bridges the gap between the holy righteous greatness of God and sinful man. Everything that we hope for in the future depends upon God's grace. Without it, we have no hope. There is nothing.

So the concept is this. God took the color (blue) that we can associate with what He is—He is goodness personified; He is greatness personified. And everything in the tabernacle, everything that was involved in the worship of God was tinted by this one thing that makes our association, our relationship with God, possible: His grace. Not only what we are at this moment, but everything that we hope to accomplish in the end depends upon that gift.

The most abundant thing we can see is the blue sky. That gives us a picture of what God's grace is like. His grace is abundant. It is always there; even behind the grey sky is the blue sky.

So even in transporting things, regardless of the circumstance, regardless of the condition, He made the Israelites see blue.

There is an interesting verse that the Apostle Paul gave us in I Corinthians, the resurrection chapter. Connect this to the color blue, because Paul is going to connect it to grace. Then also let us connect it in relation to our own life.

I Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am [What was Paul? He was a repentant sinner that God by His grace called, granted repentance to, and made an apostle. The apostle who may have written more of the New Testament than anyone else], and His grace toward me was not in vain [Why? Because Paul yielded.]; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

God's grace is everything to us. So God associates it to a color that lifts one's spirit and creates joy, because it is so pleasant. It is so big, because it is the dominant color in the world: blue. So God's grace should be the dominant quality in our life.

There are two other interesting aspects of the blue robe. The first is that like Christ's robe, it was seamless, having only a hole for the head to pass through. (We read of this in the book of Exodus.) That hole God specifically pointed out was bound by a neck band. That neck band is what is so interesting. It even mentions there in the scriptures that it was woven to the strength of a habergeon.

A habergeon is a sleeveless coat of mail. "Remember in days of old, when knights were bold..." they wore a coat of mail to protect their chest. That coat of mail, though it had bits of metal within it, had a certain weave to it. God did not say, "Put metal in it." He just said to weave it with that material, again probably linen.

It is the strength of the weave that God was concerned about. That is why God wanted it to be woven with a different weave than the rest of the robe. Even with a material like linen, which is not all that strong—if it was woven with that kind of weave, it became virtually impossible to tear it.

So up at the neck was this hole that was woven with this curious weave, and it gave a great deal of strength to that place. There is a figurative picture here. Everything that the robe represented of the grace (remember the blue): the position, the character, and the personality of Jesus Christ could not under any circumstance be torn away from Him. He was what He was. Nobody was going to break His character.

Now you are familiar with very much of His life shown in the four gospels. He was frequently challenged. Satan came—"If you be the Son of God..." He was challenging Him to break faith that God would protect Him. But He eventually told Satan to get out of there. He could not be wrested; His faithfulness to God could not be wrested away.

"If you be Christ, the Chosen of God; if you be the Christ, save Yourself and us..." at the crucifixion. People challenged Him to get to His ego, to see if He could be broken out of His humility to the Father. There are many, many more.

God answered all of these challenges against Him. Maybe not right away, but He did get them all by means of the resurrection. That resurrection proved He was everything that He said that He was. Those challenges against Him could not be taken from Him.

One final curious item is that at the bottom of the hem of the robe, it was adorned with small bells that tinkled as the priest walked. In between each bell was a cloth pomegranate separating each bell to keep them from striking each other. Men assume that when the priest walked, there was a melodic sound. It was not jangled—that is why the pomegranate was there—because each bell made a nice clear melodic sound as he walked. So that it was not unpleasant. It was not jangling at all.

Now what God says directly is that when the high priest went in to the holy place, you could hear him walking around in there. In other words, the bells were there so that people would know that he was still alive, because they were not in there with him.

Anytime he went in there, he was alone communing with God. In a way, it was a reminder to the high priest, "Remember Nadab and Abihu!" They took their job lightly; and they were dead in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye when lighting came out from God and struck them dead as they were going about their duties around the tabernacle.

In a way, anybody who was serious about his relationship with God in the centuries that followed would be reminded about what happened to Nadab and Abihu. So the high priest had those bells on the robe that those outside would know that their high priest was at least faithfully following through and God accepted what he was doing inside.

There is another possibility. That is, pomegranates are loaded with seeds and also juice. When twelve spies went into the Promised Land, they came back with grapes, with figs, and with pomegranates. That is what they chose to bring back. Those fruits, and apparently especially the pomegranates, became associated with prosperity and peace. They were going to go into the land, and it was going to be peaceful, and it was going to produce a tremendous amount of prosperity as symbolized by the pomegranates (what was inside the pomegranate).

So it symbolized prosperity. But there are others who find that there is a relationship to the bells. In a couple of places, God says "The sound of them went to the whole earth." He is talking about the gospel. God's representatives, His agents, His prophets, His apostles, and Jesus Christ the Chief, spoke the word. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

So not only were they to be reminded that the priest was still alive, but also they were reminded that God was keeping His word, and the sound of His word was going out to the entire world. It was going to be unending so that faith would be able to be produced.

We do not have a high priest who has bells. We are to live by faith. We are to live knowing that He is there in the presence of God, and He is alive. He is always working in our behalf. That is what Hebrews 7:25-26 say. He is there!

Those bells and the pomegranates together were a means of assurance that God will always take care of us and that God's word is going to go out. It will never stop going out.

The next items that we will go into in the next sermon are the ephod, the curious girdle, and the breast plate. There is another girdle. These together are really fascinating. We will find that these

items are always considered as one in the scriptures, even though they might be mentioned separately because of some occurrence that was going on in a given context. Yet God also shows the ephod, breastplate (we will see there is something that goes to the shoulder as well), and the curious girdle are all considered to be one item because they are unified in a way that is very interesting.