

**SOS Verse:**

**Exodus 33:18** *Moses said, "Please show me your glory."*

INTRO: Max Lucado's "Light of the Storage Closet" from *God Came Near*  
Candle excuses I'd add:

- Afraid the dark will get on their light and make it darker
- Despise people blinded by the darkness
- Broken wick, can't shed any light, but gives off all kinds of heat

Lucado's little parable arises from Jesus' words in Mt 5:14-16:

**Matthew 5:14-16** *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

But we could just go to the OT tabernacle, particularly the ministry of the priests, to learn the same thing... **[Invite people to turn to Ex 28.]**

**CALLED TO SERVICE**

Exodus 25-31 contain instructions for the tabernacle, the tent where God would dwell in the midst of His people. It was mobile and relatively small in size, but its significance was enormous. These instructions for its assembly aren't like the throw-away pages you get with a pressboard desk from Office Max. There's a message here. And in the middle of these 7 chapters, we have 2 entire chapters—28-29—exclusively devoted to the ministry of the priests. The priests were the men who ran and cared for the tabernacle. They are introduced right away in verse 1, along with their basic calling:

**Exodus 28:1** *Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests- Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. (cf. vv 4, 41)*

The life of a priest was a life of service to God, entirely devoted to God. We'll talk much more about what that means in a moment, but for now you need to notice what qualified them for service:

1. Family lineage – Aaron's sons (v 1)
2. Ceremony of consecration (ch 29) – sacrifice, washing, anointing

3. Garments (ch 28)

**"SUITED" FOR SERVICE**

Notice the special emphasis laid on the garments as the Lord introduces them to Moses:

**Exodus 28:2-4** <sup>2</sup> *And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.* <sup>3</sup> *You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.* <sup>4</sup> *These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests.*

The garments themselves are "holy" ("sacred" NIV). They convey "glory and beauty" (v2). The garments themselves "consecrate" Aaron (v3) for his service. Verse 4 names six particular garments and concludes by saying again, these garments allow Aaron and his sons "to serve God as priests."

It strikes me as odd at first, all this attention given to the priests' uniforms *to the exclusion of virtually everything else about them*. What kind of men did God require them to be? What character? What interests? How should they spend their free time? All of this is ignored, with near-exclusive focus given to their clothing. Why?

Notice again what made the priests "worthy" for their duty to serve God in the tabernacle:

**Exodus 28:40-43** *"For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. <sup>41</sup> And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. <sup>42</sup> You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; <sup>43</sup> and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.*

Verse 41 mentions the ceremony—anoint, ordain, and consecrate. But again, the main emphasis falls on their clothing. Verse 43 even says these clothes "shall be on Aaron and his sons when they go into the tent or come near the altar, lest they bear guilt and die."

Think about this for a moment. Did these clothes and that ceremony actually change their standing in God's eyes? Was it really this special uniform that protected them from "guilt and death"? Is God that obsessed with appearance and hygiene? Is He one of those people who focuses completely on the outside and doesn't really care about who you are inside? Isn't that a little superficial?

Of course God is not a fashion-obsessed, superficial, insecure 12-yr-old girl. This focus on clothes and ceremonies is symbolic, pointing to something deeper. What's the lesson here?

***The priests' worthiness for their calling had nothing to do with them. Their fitness came entirely from outside themselves.*** Nothing they were in themselves caught God's attention. No choice of theirs made them worthy. No superior personal qualification got them in. ***Their "worthiness" for their calling came entirely from outside themselves—*** born into Aaron's family, washed and consecrated via the death of an animal, and dressed in special garments.

God's words at the end of the dedication ceremony make all this quite explicit:

**Exodus 29:43-44** <sup>43</sup> *There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.* <sup>44</sup> *I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests.*

It wasn't their holy lives that make them worthy to be priests. It wasn't even actually the clothes they wore. It was God. "It shall be sanctified by my glory" (v 43). "I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar" (v 44). "Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me" (v 44b).

How did this work? The clothes, the sacrifices, and the washing were all symbols, pointing to something else. Something real. Something future.

***The clothes, the sacrifices, and the washing were, in the mind of God, an emblematic appeal to a reality which truly will make them worthy to stand before God but which will not occur in time until 1400 years later:***

**Hebrews 9:13-14** *If the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh,* <sup>14</sup> *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience*

*from dead works to serve the living God.*

All this emphasis placed on washing and blood ceremony and garments for the priests points, of course, to Jesus.

Luther preached a sermon entitled "Two Kinds of Righteousness," in which he described our own good works as a form of righteousness entirely good and proper, but secondary in time and importance. The first and most important righteousness he called "alien righteousness" = "the righteousness of another, instilled from without."

Here is where we begin to see that the priests in the tabernacle are not the pastors in the church. Today's equivalent to the priesthood is the whole Christian congregation. All Christians wear robes of alien righteousness, do everything in God's presence, and are consecrated to God for service:

**1 Peter 2:5** *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

This means that, as we understand the role of these priests, we'll better understand our own calling.

## REPRESENTATIVE SERVICE

Priests had one foundational duty: representation. They represented the people to God and God to the people.

The people to God:

**Exodus 28:9-12** <sup>9</sup> *You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel,* <sup>10</sup> *six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth.* <sup>11</sup> *As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree.* <sup>12</sup> *And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance.*

(cf. also the breastpiece - vv 21,29)

The priests were identified with the people. They represented the 12 tribes of Israel in their service before God, the high priest literally carrying the names of the tribes on his body as he entered the Holy

Place every day.

God to the people:

**Exodus 28:4-5** *They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. <sup>5</sup> ¶ They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.*

The materials for composition of the priests' garments match the materials used in the tabernacle itself. Why? Because the priests were embodiments of the tabernacle, quite literally wrapped in mini-versions of the tent itself. The tabernacle represented God on earth, and so did the priests. Their garments mimic God's dwelling because they represent God. Their garments were intended to identify them with God in the minds of the people.

What about God particularly?

**Exodus 28:2** *And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.*

**Exodus 28:40** *"For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. –*

Same two words. This is what particularly about God the priests represented: His glory and beauty. His beauty is His attractiveness, His winsomeness. He's desirable. He's pleasant. He's complete. Everything we desire, everything we think is really cool, everything we could ever want is present in God in its truest and most satisfying form.

His glory is His supremacy, His matchless honor, and His majesty. His glory threatens (sinners) but His beauty beckons. He's a problem and an attraction.

This is your calling, Christian priest. You mediate God to the world, specifically, His glory and His beauty.

Let this transform how you think about yourself, your purpose, your relationships. To think in every situation, will this choice reflect the beauty and glory of God? Is that what people will notice?

Perhaps one way to contrast it is with individual words:

One the one hand, we have a Christianity of isolation, rejection, judgmentalism, criticism, hypocrisy, withdrawal, fear, anger, spite,

misunderstanding. On the other, we have a Christianity of beauty, wholeness, sincerity, friendship, healing, help, hope, understanding, kindness, and love. Profanity and ugliness vs. Glory and beauty.

Beauty and glory – this is what we image of God to the world. How much does our world need this understanding of God?

- 20 suicides in DC this year
- Gay marriage? Mud pies vs. a holiday at the sea. We were created for a holiday at the sea, but we settle for mud pies in a slum. People are unlikely to abandon their mud puddles if our own marriages don't give a clear and compelling picture of the alternative: a joy-giving sea.

To do it, you have to...

- Be captivated by His beauty and glory yourself (2Cor 3:18)
- Move toward brokenness, dysfunction, and darkness

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