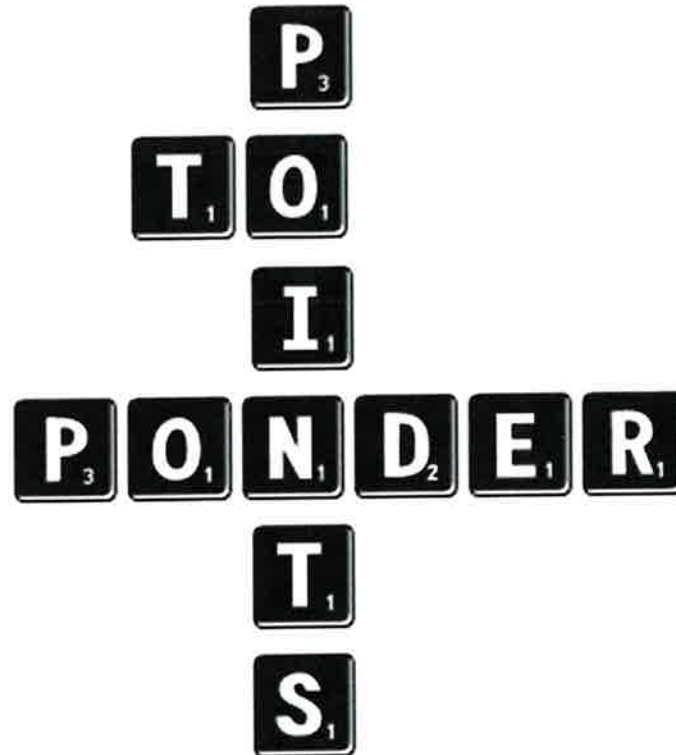




2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 13th - 19th

Sermon: July 12th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

July 13

Exodus 40:12

What an amazing privilege for Aaron to be able to enter into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies to stand before God as the chosen high priest on behalf of the people of Israel. This mortal man was allowed to enter into the presence of God and not be killed even though he was just a man and a sinful man at that. I highlight this reality for Aaron because of what took place in Exodus 32.

You may recall that this was the same man who had caused the people of Israel to commit a great sin (Ex. 32:21). The Bible says that Aaron, “Let the people break loose” (Ex. 32:25). The great sin that Aaron participated in with the people of Israel while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments and other instructions from God on the top of Mt. Sinai cost three thousand people their lives and other unfortunate and costly consequences (vv. 30-34). I think it is safe to say that at that moment in Aaron’s life, none of us would have thought of him as a good candidate for the high priest who would stand before God.

I am reminded in Exodus 39 of the mercy and grace of our great God once again as I read the history of Aaron serving the Lord as a sinner, but as a forgiven sinner clothed and washed clean. There we see the same man who had committed egregious sins against God, considered holy in the presence of God because he was covered by the provision of God to make his acceptance possible. Friends, please do not fail to see that he was not standing there on his own merit or because he was good enough in any way. No, he was standing there because God made a way possible for him and for us to come back into His presence even though we are sinners by nature.

In His instructions to Moses concerning Aaron and the other priests, God said, “Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve Me as priest” (Ex. 40:12-13). You see, steps had to be followed in order for a sinful man to enter into the presence of God so that mercy rather than judgment would be granted.

Folks, ponder the precious reality today that God has made a way for you and me to come into His presence as well. None of us are good enough or deserve the privilege that He, by grace, gives us. I also want you to praise Him today for giving you and me chances to be restored even after we have committed sins against Him. Aren’t you grateful that your sins have not forever forbidden you from drawing near to God and remaining a part of His family. I know I don’t deserve a seat at His table, but I also know that I have been granted one, nonetheless. Draw near to Him today dear one and find grace and receive mercy to help in your times of need (Heb. 4:16). Just make sure you are wearing the proper clothes. See Matthew 22:11-14 for the clear teaching on what happens to a person who attempts to get near God without the proper clothing.

July 14

Philippians 3:8-9

As we begin another “point to ponder” today, I thought it might be wise to remind you that before Aaron went into the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, not only did he have to wear the appropriate garments that were made for him in exact accordance with God’s plan, but he also had to go to the altar of burnt offerings to offer sacrifices for his own sins. In that process, he would confess his sins as he laid his hands upon the head of the sacrificial bull and rams for the purpose of making atonement. Through the cleansing water and the sacrificial blood, he was set apart to serve the Lord.

A sinner like Aaron, like you and me, was allowed to serve the Lord and approach Him because although he was fallen, he was also forgiven. Tomorrow, I am planning on beginning to write about the various elements of the priestly garments that were made by those chosen for the tasks. Today, I simply want to remind you of the need to “get clean” before you think you can approach God. Now, I am not talking about the lost person who needs to simply come to Jesus “just as they are.” I am talking about the one who says he already believes but cares nothing about holiness and sanctification. I hope that makes sense.

Brothers and sisters, for us, we too must understand our filth due to sin and how that prevents us from coming into His presence on our own. We must not take lightly that which is obviously very serious to God. Aaron was not allowed to enter the Holy Places or serve as a priest on behalf of the people if he remained stained by his sin. The priestly garments were meant, in part, to cover his shame and sin, and to make him fit to stand before God and to have a voice. We need a covering as well if we are going to have a standing before God.

I will never forget one morning during Sunday School at a previous church where I pastored, when a youth who had been to youth camp asked to lead us in prayer. He had talked a bit about the camp evangelist telling the kids that God was their friend. On one level, that is true but that should never cause us to fail to understand His transcendence and holiness. He is God and we are not! Anyway, the young man began his prayer like this, “Yo God, waz up? It’s me again.” Needless to say, I stopped him right there and attempted to correct his disrespectful approach to our holy God.

Friend, were it not for the righteousness of Christ that covers us, we would have no way or means to approach God. His perfect obedience and righteousness were imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:21) and is the reason that by faith in Him, we can be declared justified by God. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8b-9 these amazing words, “...in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God that depends on faith” (Phil 3:8b-9). The clothing that Aaron wears in the holy places that qualifies him to approach God is a picture or shadow of the righteousness of Christ granted to all who by faith receive His redemptive work on the cross. Are you clothed in Christ?

July 15

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Have you noticed that the materials used to make the priest's garments were made from the same materials used to make the tabernacle itself. One might just say they used what they had but I hope you and I see the typology once again in the design. What God is revealing to us is that the day will come when His children will each become the temple where God resides. Paul wrote to the Corinthians these words, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). What a beautiful reminder of who we are and what we are as God's children here on earth.

God filled the temple with the cloud of His glory as recorded at the end of the book of Exodus. Now, rather than living in a manmade structure, He lives in His people by His Holy Spirit. So, in Exodus 39 we are receiving a picture of what it looks like to be "Holy to the Lord." It seems a little strange to us when you consider all that made up the priestly garments. The various parts were crafted with precise detail, and every piece held some significance in relation to the ministry of the priest as well as the holiness with which they were to have before coming to the Lord.

I find it interesting that a plate made of pure gold was placed on the front of the turban that the priest wore on his head. The plate had this inscription engraved on it: "Holy to the Lord" (Ex. 39:30-31). I thought about the mercy seat on the top of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. Remember that we had talked about the first thing God would see when He came down into the Holy of Holies was not the law of judgment but the seat of mercy over top of it. In a similar fashion, when Aaron would enter His presence, God would see the declaration on the front of the priest's turban that stated he was holy to the Lord. Friend, as I have said before, we cannot enter the presence of Holiness without holiness being imputed to us by Christ first.

Aren't you grateful that today, we no longer have to put on all that attire just to enter the presence of God? I can only imagine how long it would take to meticulously get dressed knowing that every detail had to be exact. The burnt offerings, the ceremonial washing, and the ephod, breastplate, the robe, the coat and cap, the turban with the gold plate, and even special linen undergarments. A simple pair of fruit of the loom would not get the job done. It was tedious and time consuming but was absolutely necessary to cover a man's sin and to make him acceptable to the Lord.

Church family, we don't have to do all of that because Jesus became our Great High Priest who did it all for us. Do not however fail to see that you and I must put on Christ and follow Him in obedience as we surrender to His Lordship over us. Please take the time that they would have spent getting ready to enter into His presence by preparing your heart and mind to worship and commune with God today.

July 16

Hebrews 2:17, 4:15-16

We will spend the next several “points to ponder” examining the various pieces of the priestly garments. The first piece mentioned in Exodus 39 is the ephod. Just for knowledge’s sake, there seems to have been a shift in the meaning of the word *ephod* as time passed. At the outset, and for our use, we will stay with the original understanding of the term as it related to the priestly garment that Aaron, the high priest wore. It later seems to have become a word associated with images or idols as it was used in Judges 8:26-27 and Judges 17:5. Again, we will focus on the ephod as a piece of the high priest’s garments.

To picture the ephod, think of it as sort of a sleeveless vest. The front and back were held together by two shoulder straps which were the most important parts of the ephod. On the top of the shoulder straps were onyx stones, one on each shoulder, that were crafted into gold filigree. Think of something like a woman’s brooch with the onyx stone in the center of it and penned onto the shoulder strap. The filigree itself would have been absolutely gorgeous and the technique used to make it astounding.

On each stone on the shoulders was engraved 6 of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:9-10). This was to show that the priest represented the nation of Israel before the Lord. I like to think of it this way: As he went about his priestly duties, he was carrying the people on his shoulders. Whenever the high priest would make sacrifices of atonement, wash in the bronze basin, trim the lights on the lampstand, eat the bread of the Presence, offer the incense of prayer, or stand before the mercy seat at the ark of the covenant, he was doing so on behalf of the people of God.

Dear ones, I hope and pray that you get a clear picture of how our Lord and Savior serves as our representative before the Father today. He is our great high priest! As you read about Aaron and the priesthood established by God, don’t ever forget that in so many ways it is a shadow of who and what Jesus would be for His people. The author of Hebrews wrote, “Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins for the people” (Heb. 2:17). Later he wrote, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:14-15a). What Aaron and men who filled the priesthood did imperfectly, Jesus Christ accomplished perfectly, sinlessly, and by the power of His shed blood and the victory of His perfect life.

Today, we have a Great High Priest who carries our burdens on His shoulders and stands before the Father on our behalf. He is the One who clothes us in royal and priestly garments that qualifies us to stand before our Father with confidence because of His finished work. I am forever grateful that He bore us then and still does now.

July 17

Exodus 28:29; Hebrews 8:6

Today we will examine the breastpiece crafted for the priest to wear before God. The breastpiece was made from the same materials as the ephod. It was in the shape of a square and was attached to the ephod with gold chains and rings on the shoulders of the ephod. On the surface of the breastpiece were four rows of precious stones. Each row contained three different stones totaling twelve stones. Like the names engraved on the onyx stones on the shoulder straps of the ephod, the twelve stones represented the twelve tribes of Israel.

Once again, you get the idea that the priest was representing the nation of Israel before their holy God. I believe that it is safe to say that the placement of the names engraved on the shoulders of the ephod pictured how the high priest would carry the people on his shoulders before God. In like manner, we can be encouraged knowing that he would also carry the people of God near to his heart as demonstrated by the placement of the breastpiece across his chest and torso. Surely, we have come to understand that Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, carries us as His sheep close to His heart.

I am moved to devotion to our Lord and surrender to His will when I meditate on the fact that we are described in the Scriptures as His sheep and He as our Shepherd (Ps. 23). Picture in your mind the moments when a sheep is stranded or injured and you see the Shepherd bringing the sheep back on his shoulders or in his arms. The thought that Jesus carries us like that, near His heart, is a great reminder that He genuinely cares for us. Peter wrote, "Cast your burdens upon the Lord for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). The placement of the breastpiece signifies that for us (Ex. 28:29). The Lord's ministry to us is one of support and sympathy.

I find it interesting the way the breastpiece is described in Exodus 28. There it is called a "breastpiece of judgment" (v.15, 30). Inside the breastpiece was a pouch that contained the Urim and Thummim. These were literally gemstones or "dice" used to consult the will of God in some situations. The word Urim means "lights" and Thummim means "perfections". Some propose that God would cause the Urim and Thummim to light up in varying patterns to reveal His decision. Others propose that the Urim and Thummim were kept in a pouch and were engraved with symbols identifying yes / no and/or true / false. Either way, it was a way in which God made His perfect will clear to the high priest.

When I consider Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of and more excellent high priest, I think of the fact that in Him is perfect judgment and wisdom (Heb. 8:6). This had to be granted to the high priest from "outside" of himself, thus the Urim and Thummim. Jesus contains all of this wisdom, holiness, beauty, and value within Himself. He is the more excellent One. Jesus knows what we need without casting dice and He knows how to judge us with righteous judgment as He Himself is holiness, wisdom, and perfect love.

July 18

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Much is to be learned from what God reveals to us in His Word. Some of the lessons are crystal clear while others are implied in what is revealed. As I have considered the intricate details provided to Moses and passed on to those who would eventually do the work of constructing the tabernacle and all of the objects that were created for use within, I stand amazed at God's attention to detail and the precision in His requirements. Friend, we must not fail to see that God makes a way and regulates how we are to approach Him, worship Him, serve Him, and aid in building and advancing His kingdom.

For all of the churches in the nation who think they can do whatever they want in the Name of Jesus, worship in any manner they so choose, pick and choose portions of the Bible they will obey and those which they will ignore, and otherwise make it up as they go, you need to know you stand in judgment and are in serious trouble. People who disregard God's clear instructions for every area of life should never expect His favor or blessings. The Bible says, "All Scripture is God breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). All the guidance that we need to do everything He has called us to is provided by Him in His Word. All of it is to be obeyed and none of it can be ignored.

Consider what we have learned over the past few weeks in our preaching through the book of Exodus. Everything that was used for the tabernacle was counted, weighed, and numbered. God pays close attention to detail and expected Moses and his contractors to do the same. Nothing was to be altered or left out. Nothing was to be added that He didn't prescribe in His plans. Every detail of God's divine mind is essential to His Work and to the glory of God. If a loop was missing or a peg not put in place, then there would be slack in the cord which would cause a curtain to be out of place and the disorder would spread. The whole tabernacle would be affected if one detail were out of place.

Eight times in Exodus 39 alone the phrase, "As the Lord commanded" is used. Two more times in vv. 32 and 42 it says that the children of Israel did all that Moses commanded. There was strict adherence to all the details with no exceptions. There was no room left for man's practicality, his reason, or his common sense. God did not give an outline and allow man to fill it in. He left no room for man to "do his own thing". As a matter of fact, in Exodus 25:40 it says, "And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain." God meant for His work to be accomplished exactly how He determined with no room for us to make it up on our own.

There are many things in Israel's history that we should abhor and never emulate. They murmured, doubted, disobeyed, rebelled, and sinned egregiously at times. In the construction of the tabernacle, may we imitate their devotedness to His design and details, and may we obey with our whole hearts as we serve Him in the church today.

July 19

Psalm 132:9; Hebrews 7:26-27

It was God's plan all along to make it possible for man to come back into His presence in a state of holiness like he was before the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. The high priest wore a robe embroidered with pomegranates and bells on the bottom hem. The pomegranates were a sign of fruitfulness as they are full of seeds for reproduction. The turban sat upon his head with the gold plate declaring him – "Holy to the Lord". The people were not holy, so God made a way for a representative to stand before Him in their place.

We will end this week of "Points to Ponder" considering the superior High Priest that came to be all that we see in the high priest and much more. From head to toe, the high priest looked almost perfect and certainly splendid in the incredible, expensive, beautiful garment that covered his body. With all his privilege, position, and prominence among the people, the high priest was not perfect. He had frailties and sins and faced death like any other man. The gold plate on his forehead said holy to the Lord, but we know his heart didn't always follow suit.

The psalmist prayed in Psalm 132:9 that God's priests would be "clothed in righteousness." The high priest was most certainly clothed to the nines, but we know that clothes do not make a man holy. Remember that he needed to make atonement for his own sins as much as for anybody else. Recall that Hebrews 4:16 and 10:21 refer to Jesus Christ alone as our GREAT High Priest. The limitations and weaknesses that the high priest had were not true of Jesus Christ.

You have heard Pastor Aaron and I talk about the fact that we don't need a priest in the fashion of the priests of Catholicism. The truth however, is that we all need a priest because of our sinfulness who will make atonement for us. Without a priest to do this for us we would all perish. We need a priest who will pray for us in our trials and temptations as well. This is one of the many reasons we should pause and give thanks for Jesus our great High Priest. Jesus does for us what the high priest did for Israel. Jesus carries us on His shoulders and holds us near to His heart. He is always robed in royal righteousness and forever stands as holy to the Lord.

Jesus is superior as our High Priest in many ways. He ministers in a superior place – not a tabernacle made with hands but in heaven itself (Heb. 8:1-2). Jesus also has a superior righteousness to that of any earthly high priest. His righteousness is more than external clothing and ritual sacrifices and washing. Jesus is clothed with the righteousness of His own perfection (Heb. 7:26-27). Our Lord's ministry is forever and because He, unlike the normal high priest, will never die. His sympathy and love for us is superior to that of the high priest because He knows exactly how we feel.

The greatest area of superiority that Jesus maintains over high priests like Aaron is the efficacy of His sacrifice. Jesus shed His own blood for us not the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 9:12). Because He is the sinless Son of God, His sacrifice was perfect and everyone who trusts in Him will be forever, perfectly saved. Friend, He did all this to enable us to serve the Holy God (Heb. 9:14). He became our Priest so we could become God's priests on earth.