Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Perhaps the closest modern equivalent to what we have read here is when a king or queen, or a president, or a Pope is sworn into office or ordained. Months go into planning ceremonies like that so that everything went right on the day. But few if any of us will ever attend a ceremony like that. But all of us have probably attended or been part of a wedding. And weddings are elaborate ceremonies where a lot of time and thought goes into what everyone will wear and the order of the service and the music and the rituals of a wedding. There is even a wedding rehearsal so that it all goes right on the day.

Well, none of that comes close to what is described in chapters 8-9. And that is because these chapters describe **the beginning of worship**. Let me explain: The Book of Exodus contains instructions about how to build the tabernacle and its furniture and utensils, how to make anointing oil, and how to make the uniforms that the priests would wear. And when all of this was done, the Lord said about the tabernacle, “*There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests*.” So the public worship of God, by a congregation, was about to happen for the first time. Individuals and families and tribes had worshipped God with altars and sacrifices before this, but here regular, structured, congregational worship was about to begin.

So Exodus ends with the glory cloud of the Lord coming down and filling the tabernacle. And the next thing that needed to happen was the consecration of the tabernacle and the altar and the priests. And **consecration means setting aside to a sacred purpose**.

So Leviticus began with seven chapters of intricate detail about the sacrifices that needed to be offered to remove the sin and uncleanness, so that the Lord could remain among His people. And now we come to the consecration of Aaron as the High Priest and his sons as the regular priests. And it would take seven days of elaborate ceremony for them to be lead the people in worship!

And I hope you noticed that again and again it is stated that every little detail had to be done **exactly as the Lord commanded**. And this was not so that, just like with today’s investiture ceremonies or weddings, everything would run smoothly. Look again at **8:35** of our text: There Moses was telling Aaron what he had to do in that part of the ceremony, and he said, “*At the entrance of the tent of meeting you shall remain day and night for seven days, performing what the LORD has charged, so that you do not die*”! If Aaron or his sons got any part of this ceremony wrong, they would die! And we will see exactly that happen in chapter 10 with two priests who got it wrong. But that’s chapter 10 and the negative side of worship, if you like. What we see at the end of chapter 9 is that because they did do all that the Lord had commanded the glory of the Lord appeared to all of the people – the positive side of worship. And clearly that was something incredibly special and wonderful and beautiful, and to be desired and enjoyed!

So this section of Leviticus is about holiness and obedience and worship. And as we shall see, it points us to the Lord Jesus in all sorts of ways! And there are implications here for public worship and eternity. We will see that public worship today is about experiencing and enjoying the *spiritual* presence of the Lord Jesus, as preparation or ‘practice’ for enjoying His presence, *face to face*, in eternity!

So chapters 8-9 are the beginning of worship. This is where public worship, the Lord meeting with His congregation, began. And we want to see **how this elaborate ceremony points us to enjoying the presence of Christ as our chief joy**.

And we will do this by looking at each of these two chapters as our two main sections, beginning with chapter 8 and the **Elaborate** **Preparations** for worship, and then turning to chapter 9 where **congregational** **Worship** Begins.

1. So first of all, chapter 8 and the **Elaborate Preparations** for worship.
	1. And it begins in **verses 1-5** with the instructions of the Lord about what was to be done:
		1. Later on in Numbers we learn that the whole tribe of Levi, which is the tribe that Moses and Aaron were from, assisted with tabernacle duties and guarded it from intruders and taught the people the Law of God. But only **Aaron and his sons were priests**, as we see in **verse 2**. So there were not many priests to begin with, and two of them will die, very soon, as I mentioned!
		2. In **verse 3** we see that this ceremony was so important that the **whole congregation** of Israel had to assemble – men, women, and children had to leave their tents and gather by the entrance to the tabernacle courtyard to and watch and listen and participate. And the word “congregation” is noteworthy. They were not an audience who were watching a show; they were a congregation gathered to participate in worship.
		3. And then in **verses 4&5** we get the first two references to what is repeated throughout these chapters – the commandment of the Lord. Everything had to be done exactly as the Lord commanded.
	2. So, with the whole congregation gathered there, **verse 6** begins the consecration of the priests. And four things happened – washing, clothing, anointing, and sacrifices, which we will briefly consider in turn.
		1. But before we look at each of those, we must note the gospel message in **the role of Moses**. For there is a very beautiful picture of salvation here! Think about it – the whole point of the consecration ceremony was to remove all uncleanness from the priests, because they were sinful human beings. Over here you had the holy God and over there you had these unclean men who could only come over to God’s side and serve Him as priests *after* they had been ordained and purified. But Aaron and his sons could not ordain and purify themselves, because they were unclean. So how could they be made clean? How could they be made fit to cross over and enter into the presence of God? Answer? Moses. It is Moses who washes them, dresses them, anoints them, and offers sacrifices for them, so that they can enter into the presence and service of the Lord. And we have a word for a person who brings together those who separated. Do you know what that word is? It is a **Mediator**.
			1. Now, Moses was a sinful human being himself. But the Lord appointed Moses and equipped Him to be a mediator between God and Israel. That’s what the story of the **burning bush** is all about – Moses was called and appointed to represent God to the people and the people to God. And if we think about this a little more, we see that Moses was kind of the **King** of Israel; he was their ruler. And because he was from the tribe of Levi and he offered sacrifices, he was also a **priest**. And, as we see in verses 1&5, Moses passed on the word of the Lord to the people, which makes him also a **prophet**. So Moses was the prophet, priest, and king, Mediator, who made it possible for unclean men to enter into and enjoy the presence of the Lord.
			2. Do you see the beautiful picture of salvation here? You and me, just like the priests, are sinful, unclean human beings. And we cannot cleanse ourselves, because we add to our guilt every day. So we also need a mediator. And what this chapter teaches us is that He must be like Moses, but greater! So He must be a prophet, priest, and King. And He must be sinless and perfect, in other words, not just a man but also God. And He must be able to conquer death. So boys and girls, does the Bible tell us about someone who is like Moses but greater? Someone who did not sin, who is man and God, and who conquered death? Can you think of someone like that? Jesus! This is the message of **Hebrews 3** – Jesus is our greater Moses!
		2. And this wonderful truth is explored further in the four parts of the consecration ceremony: The first part is in **verse 6** where Moses **washed** Aaron and his sons with water. I am sure you boys and girls have played in the mud at sometime and needed a good bath. And that is because it takes water to remove dirt. So this washing symbolized cleansing; the removal of sin. And we see this language throughout the Bible:
			1. **Psalm 51:2**, “*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*”
			2. **Ezekiel 36:25**, “*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannessess*.”
			3. **Titus 3:5-6**, “*He saved us … by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour*.”
			4. So, just as Moses washed Aaron and his sons, so we must be washed of our iniquities by the blood of Jesus.
		3. And secondly, from **verse 7**, Moses **dressed** Aaron. So he took away Aaron’s common, filthy garments and dressed him in this magnificent uniform that was a picture of purity and holiness. And this too is a picture of salvation is repeated elsewhere in the Bible:
			1. **Isaiah 61:10**, “*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation*.”
			2. And **Revelation 7:9** provides us with a picture of the saints in heaven who are “*clothed in white robes*.”
			3. So just as Moses dressed Aaron, so, by faith in Christ, our ‘garments’ of sin are removed and we are clothed with the garments of salvation.
		4. And then, thirdly, from **verse 10**, Moses **anointed** the Tabernacle and the altar and the utensils, and then Aaron’s head. So Aaron was set apart for sacred duty/office.
			1. And over the last couple of weeks we read Lord’s Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism. And that Lord’s Day speaks about Jesus as the Christ – the Anointed One – our perfect prophet, priest, and king, and how as Christians we share in His anointing and are prophets, priests, and kings in Christ’s service. **1 John 2:20** says, “*But you have been anointed by the Holy One*.” So as Aaron was anointed with oil, we must be anointed with the Holy Spirit to the service of Christ.
		5. And fourthly, from **verses 14-29**, Moses **offered sacrifices** for Aaron and his sons.
			1. And this section pretty much repeats the details of the offerings that we learned about in chapters 1-7. The only offering not included here is the guilt offering, because that was for a *specific* sin, where as it is sin in general that is in view here.
			2. A new detail is what we read in **verses 23-24**, which is where **Moses puts blood on the ear lobes, the right thumb, and the right toe of Aaron and his sons**. And it sounds bizarre, doesn’t it, but if you boys and girls were to stretch yourself out as wide as possible, the parts at the very outside of you would be your ears, your finger tips and your toes. Right? So these three body parts represent the whole body. And many commentators explain this act as so that the priests would have ears to hear holy words, hands to do holy deeds, and toes to walk a holy path of obedience. So that’s a lovely prayer that we can pray, isn’t it: Lord, give me ears to hear your word, hands to serve you and others, and feet that walk the path of holiness.
			3. But what we have noted again and again in this sermon series is that the sacrifices and blood of animals did not actually remove sin. They pointed forward to a greater sacrifice. **Hebrews 9:13-14** says, “*For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls … sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, 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*.”
		6. So the key point in all of this is that while Aaron and his sons first needed to be washed and dressed and anointed and have sacrifices offered for their sins, in order for them to be able to serve as priests and offer sacrifices for the people, Jesus did not because He is the sinless Son of God! **Hebrews 9:26**: “*[Jesus] appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*.”
			1. Are you seeing the link from Leviticus to Jesus yet? He is being proclaimed in every detail of these offerings and ceremonies. He is being set before you as the Saviour you need. Is Jesus your Saviour? Have you confessed your sin and rested in and received His perfect holiness?
	3. Well, before we move on to chapter 9, one brief observation from the final parts of the consecration ceremony that are described in **verses 30-36**. There we see that Moses took more blood and sprinkled it on the altar and on Aaron and his sons, and their garments. And then he instructed Aaron and his sons to eat the meat and bread of the peace and grain offerings, and to burn up whatever was leftover. And then, from **verse 33**, Moses told them to stay in the tabernacle courtyard for **seven days**.And it is not spelled out here, but **Exodus 29** explains that they offered a bull as a sin offering in the morning, and two lambs as burnt offerings, one in the morning and one in the evening, each day, also. But it took seven whole days and all of this ceremony and separation and sacrifices for Aaron and his sons to be ready to serve as the Lord’s priests.
		1. And this is a reminder that sanctification is a slow process. And if you look at yourself you will surely be nodding your head about now – uh huh! Yup! How long does it take you to sin? A millisecond. Anger/lust/greed/envy – Boom! How long does it take you to stop committing that sin? Some of us have been trying our whole lives and we still fall into that sin. One commentator said, “A man may defile himself in a moment, but sanctification and the removal of uncleanness is generally a slower process.” Its so true, isn’t it.
		2. But I want to encourage you by pointing you to Christ. Think of the Gospel of Matthew. Did Jesus just arrive on earth and immediately begin preaching and healing? No. He was born as a baby and He spent 30 odd years being taught by His parents and ‘catechism teachers,’ etc. And even after He was baptized and anointed for His public ministry, what is the first thing that He did? Did He immediately begin preaching and healing? No. He was led into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by the devil. And none of this was because He had to be sanctified or purified, like we do. But listen to these words from **Hebrews 5:8-10**, “*Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek*.” So this is not to say that He was ever disobedient, but His obedience to His Father’s will expanded with every day of life and with every experience and with every temptation. So if it took 30 years and 40 days for the Lord Jesus to be ready to serve as our perfect High Priest, then don’t be surprised that your sanctification is a slow process. And remember the promise of **Phil. 1:6**, “*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*.”
2. Well, chapter 9 is shorter than chapter 8, so what we have to say about this chapter will be shorter than our first section also ☺ But here in chapter 9 – **Congregational** **Worship** begins.
	1. The seven days had passed. The time for Aaron to step up and lead worship for the first time had arrived.
		1. And every elder here who has led worship will surely remember the first time he led worship. It is terrifying! You don’t want to muck it up. And most of them, if not all of them, will remember having dreams about disasters happening in a worship service! Ahh!
		2. But as we have noted, that is nothing compared to what was expected of Aaron his sons and the people that day – get this wrong and they might all die! But, get it right, and they would experience something quite amazing, as we see in **verses 4&6**: “*The Lord will appear to you*!” Wow! That is what everyone there hoped to see!
	2. Before we look at the worship service of that day, though, a quick note about the **eighth day**. It was on a Saturday, Sabbath Day, that chapter 8 began and Moses gathered the congregation and consecrated Aaron and his sons. And then Aaron and his sons stayed at the tabernacle for seven days – Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. So now, this day, the eighth day, was Sunday. And that means that the very first congregational worship of Israel’s history was held on a Sunday! So we have a pointer to Sunday worship right here! And who led the service? The priests who had been spiritually dead but were purified or ‘resurrected’ to living service. And on what day was Jesus resurrected? Sunday. And this service ends with the glory of the Lord appearing to people and fire coming out to consume the offerings. And perhaps that reminds you of the Day of Pentecost, when “*there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*.” And what day of the week was Pentecost Day? Sunday. So it comes as no surprise at all when we read in **Acts 20:7** that Christians were gathering for worship on Sunday! And its all here in shadow form in Leviticus 9!
	3. Well, in terms of the worship service itself, it began with Aaron offering sacrifices for himself and his sons, and then offering sacrifices for the people, as we see in **verses 2-21**. And there are just two observations that I want to make about this:
		1. The first is that again we see **the pervasiveness of sin**. And pervasive means spreading everywhere.
			1. Some of us will remember a TV commercial from back in the day that was about **toothpaste**. And in the commercial, the teacher is explaining to the students how toothpaste works. So she took a piece of chalk and dipped into this blue liquid and showed it to the children. And the blue liquid started at the edge of the chalk but slowly seeped all the way into the middle. And one of the children said, “It does get in!”
			2. And that’s a good picture of sin – it does get in; it clings to everything; it saturates every part of us and every part of creation.
			3. So despite Moses offering four types of offering for Aaron and his sons and then Aaron and his sons offering a sin and burnt offering every day for seven days, they still had to begin this worship service with offerings for their own sin and uncleanness.
			4. So we must never minimize the reality of sin – it affects our thoughts and emotions and actions and words and deeds, and every part of creation. So we should be thankful that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, the Father does not see our sin but His righteousness, and we should pray that Jesus would return soon to fully and finally purify creation of the stain of sin.
		2. And the second observation is a powerful encouragement for sinners like you and me. I have mentioned already that God gave Moses the instructions for building the Tabernacle and the utensils, and making Aaron’s garments and the anointing oil and incense in Exodus 25-30. But do you remember what happened while Moses was up on the mountain receiving these instructions from the Lord? What did the people and Aaron do? They made a golden calf, which they worshipped as an image of God! And Moses came down the mountain and he smashed the tablets with the 10 Commandments on them, and then he smashed the golden calf. And **chapter 32** ends with these words: “*The Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made*.”
			1. Do you think Aaron might have had the golden calf episode in his mind over these eight days? Would he be allowed to serve as High Priest? Would he survive this consecration?
			2. Well, look at verse 2; what is the first thing that Aaron had to do as High Priest? “*Take for yourself a bull calf for a sin offering*…” And then, down in verse 8, “*Aaron drew near to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself*.” And we see that the Lord accepted Aaron’s offering.
			3. Is that an encouragement to you, sinner? It is to me, who is also a sinner. There is forgiveness in Jesus even for serious sins!
	4. And that brings us, finally, to **verses 22-24** and the incredible **conclusion** of this worship service!
		1. It begins in verse 22 with Aaron lifting up his hands and blessing the people. And then he and Moses went into the tabernacle and perhaps prayed on behalf of the people, before coming out and blessing the people again. And it doesn’t say, but there is every likelihood that Aaron used the words that God told Him to use as a blessing that are recorded in **Numbers 6**: “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace*.”And then “*the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people*.” Wow! And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the offerings on the altar. Wow! And then we read, “*When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces*.”
		2. So, despite the fact that Aaron and the people deserved to be consumed by fire, the sacrifice was consumed instead. And this also points us to the cross – there Jesus endured the wrath and judgment of God, as our substitute sacrifice, so that we can enjoy fellowship and friendship with God, every day, but especially in public worship.
		3. So perhaps you have noticed that our worship services begin with a call to worship, just as Moses called the congregation to this worship service in v1. And the next thing we hear in our worship services is a blessing: “May the grace and peace of the Lord be with you.” And the middle part of the service is really an explanation and celebration of what the Lord Jesus did for us and what a grateful life looks like. And then our services conclude with a blessing, which is often the blessing of Aaron that I just read out before. And we see the pattern for all of this here in Leviticus 9!
		4. So let’s finish with this question: As we have seen, the people of Israel came to the tabernacle expecting to see the Lord appear to them. And in **Matthew 18:20**, Jesus said, “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*.” So do you come to church expecting to experience and enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus? Do you come to church to meet with the Lord and to see His glory revealed? Those who believe in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord will see Jesus, face to face, and enjoy His company for all eternity. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, our spirit connects with the Spirit of Christ in congregational worship. And that is why, though we are thankful that we can use Youtube during lockdown, we should long for the day when we can be together, physically, as the Lord’s congregation. And may that be next Sunday. Amen? But more than that, we should long for the day that Jesus returns to takes us to be with Himself. And may that be today! Amen? Amen.