

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

Sermon	
Passage	Ex28,29
Place & date	Denver   Jan 13, 2008
Series	Tabernakel #9
Pastor	Dirk M. Boersma

Read: Ex 28 and Hebr 4

<b>Theme</b>	Jesus brings the church before God in full color
1	your name is there
2	Jesus carries you there

Brothers and sisters, young and old,

Let's take a look at the tabernacle. We've done that 8 times before. We mostly looked at the objects there.

And you probably remember the priests who brought the sacrifices and served in the tabernacle.

But there is someone special walking around.

Look who's coming! Who is this?

what a beautiful uniform / dress!

bells – you hear him coming

He is the high priest.

But he does not look so beautiful so that we would admire him. He does not walk around in the camp because he wants to show off his uniform.

No, he wears this in the tabernacle, going inside and doing his work there. His cloths are special because they are for the Lord.

The most striking thing: special stones on his shoulders and his chest. They have names written on them. The names of God's people.

This is the beauty of it: the names of the believers are before God. Always.

Because the high priest carries these names on his shoulders and his heart, always, when he is working in the tabernacle, walking in Gods presence.

### *In God's presence*

It's getting personal: not an object, but a person: the high priest walks into the tabn every day – walking from the table to the lampstand and then to the altar – walking there before God on behalf of believers

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

While he is doing all this he carries the names of God's children with him – they're always before him!

### *Remembered*

The stones serve as a memorial before the Lord. He wants the names of his children right in front of him in his house.

God says this five times in this chapter: bring their names before me. This is a remembrance.

You wonder: would God forget them? That's kind of strange.

No. They were symbolically present before God. God wants to see them.

This is also for the believers: they must know that they are before God. They can't see the high priest when he is in the tabn, but they know that he always carries their names there.

### *Names of Jacob's sons*

Why is it so important that the names are there? And whose names are they?

The high priest has a stone on each shoulder. Each stone has 6 names engraved on it.

Instead of just one stone with the word 'Israel' there are two stones with 12 names. They get personal attention. Everyone counts.

Even the names are special: they are not the names of the 12 tribes but the names of Jacob's sons as they were born to him.

The Israelites knew the twelve tribes. That was the way they were camped around the tabernacle: tribe by tribe. That determined their identity: 'I belong to the tribe of Judah!' someone would say. The other 'I am a Zebulonite', and so on. Later, in the promised land, they would have their own territory. So the names of the tribes were important, like it is important for us to be American, or Dutch, or Maori.

Every Israelite also knew that the names of the sons of Jacob did not cover that list.

The tribe of Levi did not have their own territory because they served in the tabernacle.

And Joseph's place in the list of tribes was taken by Ephraim and Manasseh.

So on the shoulders, the list is different: these are all the sons of Jacob, including Levi and Joseph, in the order of their birth: first Reuben, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, and so on, with Benjamin on the second stone at the end.

This list reminds of the beginning: this is how it started. The 12 names remind of the time when God fulfilled his promise to Jacob. After Isaac and Jacob, suddenly God multiplies them: 12 sons! They are the basis for God's people, become 70 before leaving for Egypt, and have grown to thousands of people 500 years later.

Israel needs to remember: these tribes are not a list of 12 numbers, they were real people. They began with the sons of Jacob.

This is the first way the people are brought before the Lord. He sees them on the shoulders of the high priest. Their names are facing God and they are always in his sight.

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

### Breastpiece

The second time they appear are on the breast of the high priest, on the breastpiece that was fastened to the ephod. He carries twelve stone on his heart.

Do you see how much care is given to this piece of clothing? God describes exactly how it should be made. The four colors that we noticed last week, return, together with gold. Golden chains, gold filigree settings for the stones, and the stones themselves were 12 different, colorful gems.

*You see gold all over the tabernacle: the ark, the table, the altar of incense, the lampstand, the walls of the tabernacle. Everything is gold, reminding of God's holiness and perfection. The high priest fits right in: his clothing has all this gold in it.*

The breastpiece was a piece of art. It is very special. It is as if the whole uniform of the high priest was designed to carry this. This is the centerpiece.

It has a special place: the high priest carries it on his heart.

### Different colors: characteristic for the 12 tribes

The 12 gemstones on the breastpiece show us the 12 tribes in their unique personalities. It is difficult to tie each gemstone and its color to every tribe. But the book of Genesis describes the character of each son of Jacob and his future. Judah will be the ruler. Issachar is a donkey, Joseph a fruitful vine.

Even though we don't know the meaning of each color, it is significant that each tribe has their own stone in the breastpiece and that they are distinguished by their own color.

You can imagine the high priest stepping into the tabernacle, and each gemstone has its own glow: the green and blue and yellow – they have their individual glow before the Lord.

This is how the tribes, how the believers were presented to the Lord every day. Everything Aaron did was for the believers. The tabernacle was a place of worship and atonement: God was at the center, and at the same time, the believers were present to Him and represented before him. Each one of them was there.

This is a beautiful thing we learn about the church.

Every believer in the tent camp could say 'Aaron is carrying me inside the tabernacle, right before God'.

Now that Aaron is dead and we don't have a high priest walking around in the church, who is bringing you before God?

The book of Hebrews teaches us that Jesus has taken up this role. He is our high priest.

God told Moses that the tabernacle had to be a copy of what he had seen in heaven.

Well, Jesus does not work in a tent on earth. He is in heaven, in the real place.

That means that he carries me and you before God. We count. We are there, in heaven, in God's presence!

God knows my name. God remembers you.

You are not a number but a name. And when you finally get to heaven, Jesus will welcome you by your name: Betty, Chloë, James (– and the others) : welcome! I know you, I've always mentioned your name before the Father. And now you're here – this is where you belong.

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

Heaven is the place where our names have been registered. They are written in a book. You are not a number. God knows your name and has written down all names of everyone whom he chose to save.

Jesus, our high priest, mentions your name before the Father. You can read it in Rev 3:

*“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.” (Rev3,5)*

This is almost too good to be true. Can you imagine this?

There is no silence in heaven. Jesus mentions the names of his people to the Father and the angels. They hear your name when you believe in him and stand by that choice. When you overcome, that means when you trust in Jesus even when it is difficult, when you live by his power and don't back down, but you persevere in faith, your name is heard in heaven! Jesus says: 'Look, Father, I am protecting one of my sheep, and they persevere. My resurrection power is working in them and they are strong!'

This makes our lives and our names very important. What you do in the power of Christ, out of faith, reverberates in heaven. Jesus does not only work on earth, in our hearts, but he also mentions his victories in heaven. And no doubt he prays for you too. Your and my name are on his lips.

This is a stunning discovery!

We often think that our lives don't amount to much. And we feel like one of the thousands and thousands of believers. Who in heaven will know you? You're just a number.

And sometimes we speak about it that way: Jesus will return when the number is full. As if an angel is keeping score and only makes a mark on a clipboard when another soul is won or arrives in heaven, but you don't really count as a person.

Well, it's not like that at all.

You may know for sure that Jesus knows your name.

Maybe you have looked at this only from the wrong side: the judgment.

You remember the words Jesus says as a warning: there is a group of people that will get a terrible surprise (Luke 13)

*[23] Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, [24] “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. [25] Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ [26] “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.”*

*“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’” (Luke 13.22-27)*

'I don't know you' – that's what Jesus says to those who did not believe in him and enter the kingdom, did not live for him and did not submit to his will. They did whatever they liked, they did evil. Just knowing Jesus is not enough.

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

Perhaps you know this parable. It is a warning.

But shall we remember the flip side of this parable?

Those who do believe in Jesus and submit to his will, follow him and overcome (by his power) – they will hear Jesus say ‘I know you. Come in, beloved of my Father’ and he will mention you by name. No doubt about it.

Look around you and see how desperately people want to be remembered.

We want to be noticed. It begins in school. You want to be chosen first for the sports team. You want to hang out with the popular girl or guy in your class. There is a competition to be the best and have your name up there in the hall of fame.

People write books, make movies, and try to get in the limelight so that others will know their name. When you are in the upper layers of society it is extremely important that others know your name. Then you’ll count.

When you have accomplished much for the community they may even name a street or an airport after you.

Almost every person on earth wants to make a difference and be remembered instead of live an insignificant life and fade from memory as soon as they die. Their life is described in obituaries and their names inscribed in tombstones.

Not all of that is wrong. Our lives do count and should have a good effect on the lives of others. But in most of these things, people are looking in the wrong direction. The place where your name counts is not earth but heaven.

What matters is whether your name is known in heaven. That you are mentioned in the book of life. That Jesus mentions your name before his Father.

The high priest and the breastpiece with the 12 precious stones remind us of this. Do not build a name, a reputation for yourself on earth. It will turn to dust and blow away. Do not work for rewards and memorials on earth but put your faith in your high priest Jesus Christ.

Then you can count on it that he will mention your name in heaven.

You and your soul are infinitely valuable. When you believe you may be assured that God has chosen you and that your name is not only known but also heard in heaven. And he will make your life as colorful as one of those gemstones because you become beautiful through him. His grace places your life in a different light and now it glows, even on earth, but most of all: for God. And he is pleased to see it.

## **2. Jesus brings you there**

### *Carried on his heart*

Let’s look at one more surprise in this whole scene.

if you had lived in the tent camp at the time, you might have wondered: why are we not allowed to go into the Holy Place of the tabernacle?

You may feel insignificant: I am not like the high priest. He is the only one who gets to enter and be in God’s presence.

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

Then, look at the message in this chapter.

The high priest brings you there! Through the 12 stones, set in gold on the breastpiece, all Israel, all believers, entered the tabernacle.

The high priest brings them inside.

The 12 gemstones were a memorial for the Lord: Israel was there, right before him.

They were also a reminder for the high priest, no doubt: I am doing this work for God's people.

This bread I place on the table – that's their lives I present to God.

The 7 lamps I'm lighting tonight – that's them, shining for the Lord.

And the incense I'm burning – I'm not doing that for myself; I present their prayers to God.

### *only the high priest can bring us near to God*

Now we come to see that the 12 gemstones he carries inside are also a reminder and a lesson for us. We may enter the tabernacle through him.

And we need to realize that we need him or we would never get there.

The high priest and the other priests barely got to enter. You see it in the strict rules surrounding the tabernacle, and the punishment.

The priests had to wash themselves; they would die if they didn't.

The high priest was allowed to enter the Holiest Place only once a year and he had to bring a sacrifice.

Every time he entered the tabernacle, the sound of the bells on his robe had to be heard, or he would die.

What do these rules tell you?

That you cannot approach God by yourself. You can't run inside just like that.

God's sanctuary is a holy place.

That's why the priests were consecrated for their special task. And they represented all the believers.

The plate on Aaron's forehead tells us why this is. Engraved on it are the words 'HOLY TO THE LORD.'

*"It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD." (Ex 28:38)*

The high priest covers for the guilt of the believers. That's what Jesus does: he entered the heavens with his sacrifice, not for himself, but on our behalf, so that we can enter. We could never dream of approaching God by ourselves. We can't come to God with our own righteousness, our accomplishments, good intentions, and successes. They are totally insufficient and can't stand the fire of God's holiness. It would be like walking into a burning house dressed in a paper suit – it does not protect you but catch fire immediately and you'll die.

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

The high priest made atonement with blood. Jesus made atonement for us with his blood, and now we can show up before God, hiding in Christ. When he mentions your name it is not with anger but with love: 'Father, I've carried LeRoy's and Dirk's and Johan's guilt (and of all the others), accept him / her for my sake.' And God does. He responds to the pleading of his Son for the believers he died for.

We belong to Jesus. He carries us on his chest like Aaron did the 12 gemstones on the breastpiece.

He carries us inside! Rejoice that God knows your name and accepts you in his home.

### *Jesus is the high priest who intercedes and understands*

And now that we are in heaven, Jesus takes it a step further.

He pleads for us every day.

The book of Hebrews describes him as the high priest who has entered the heavens with his own blood, but he does not leave it at that.

Chapter 4 shows us how much Jesus means to us:

The first part of that chapter shows us how difficult it is to get into heaven. Israel did not enter the rest because they disobeyed God.

They faced a challenge – like hunger or thirst – which was a test of their faith, and they showed that they did not want to trust God.

Vs. 12 and 13 put more of a squeeze on us. They are extremely discouraging for sinners:

*"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. [13] Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Heb 4:12-13)*

God knows everything. I have to give account. How can I, a sinner, ever meet the standard of his holiness?

The answer is Jesus Christ, our high priest.

*"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. [16] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb 4:14-16)*

Jesus has gone through the heavens, and he brought us along. He carried us on his heart, he represented us, he did it for us. We are seated in the heavens with him, says Eph2. Such a great high priest we have!

## Tabernakel #9 – High priest with breastpiece with names

Therefore, hold fast to the faith you profess.

Do not toss it when life goes well and you think you can handle it yourself. Trust in him every moment.

And don't give up when you face challenges, temptations, tests of faith.

This is the message: not only did Jesus pay for your entrance to heaven, but he is right next to you in every challenge, every weakness, and every difficulty you face. And he says: 'I know what you're going through.'

That's not like a parent who tells you that they know how you feel because they were young once. That doesn't convince because you know times have changed and the things you face must be different.

It's also different from the feeling an elder or pastor has when they visit a member who is going through pain or an illness they have not experienced themselves. What can you say? At least not 'I know how you feel'. Because you don't.

But Jesus does.

He was tempted like us in every way. He realized the full consequences and saw the depth of the temptations much better than we do. He was tempted in the most difficult way because the stakes were so high: Satan offered him a way out of death and the extreme agony of suffering on the cross.

Jesus did not waver but went through the deepest suffering one can ever imagine: total loneliness because God abandoned him.

Anything we suffer is smaller than that. And therefore he can understand every type of suffering and temptation that we face.

There is no condition, no loneliness he does not understand.

He overcame and stand next to us, to encourage us: 'I know what you feel, and I've already set you free. I'm here in heaven and this will be your final destination, for sure!'

When you feel God is far and you can't reach him.

When you doubt whether you can stand the pressure and temptation any longer.

When you wonder whether God's love is real and whether heaven is not a dream, listen to the gospel of Jesus, the high priest who has gone through the heavens and is sitting at God's right hand.

He's there, carrying your name.

You are on his mind and in his heart.

And you are on his lips. He prays for you that you will persevere.

He will give you all the faith to fight your doubts and all the strength you need to fight sin and temptation.

Amen