

I. Intro.

A. You know what this person does (police officer). And this one (UPS delivery). And this one (baseball player). And you know something about the loyalties of this one (a fan at a football game all decked out in face paint, etc.). Their uniform – their clothes, their crazy fan outfit - gives them away. It says something about them - their loyalties; their identity.

B. Today we return to talk about this person - the High Priest of Israel. We looked at his role a bit last week. We return to it today to focus on one part of the uniform, which is called the Urim and Thummim. Which I don’t expect you to remember or care about, but which does point to something you will find important. How do we know what to do? How do we make decisions between good options. How do we determine “the will of God?”

1. Should I accept this job? Go to this college? Major in X or Y? Do I move home to take care of my aging parents? Should I say “yes” to this marriage proposal? What does God want me to do?

II. Welcome. Glad you are here. Congrats on making it even with Day Light savings. Car Stolen

III. We are marching through Exodus.

A. This is week 23 and we are in chapter 28. The Jews are out of Egypt and God is in the process of getting Egypt out of them.

B. We are presently in a six-chapter section in which the Lord is instructing Moses in the details about the Tabernacle – which is really all about making it clear that He now dwells among them, and in instructing them in how to draw near to him.

C. Their one-on-one conference began back in chapter ??, when God called Moses up the mountain, through the clouds and through the fire. It seemed like they would be talking more about the Ten Commandments – and it will end with that. But the text suggests that most of their time is spent discussing the tabernacle.

D. God has been laying out a plan about buildings and the furniture in the building and curtains and today is it about clothes.

E. The purpose behind this is to help them understand Him and themselves and to live well so that they rightly represent him. They have entered a covenant and so He is teaching them about Himself and about themselves - reshaping their heart and mind, giving them a clearer understanding of ultimate reality so that their lives work and His plan rolls forward.

F. The Jews are to be His people – or as Peter will later write:

1. **“... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...”.**

G. And we have been moving through Exodus – moving slowly along (not as slowly as I have done in some series. We spent two years in Philippians and two in Acts and five in Luke. But we have been are digging in here because this passage is full of insight for us. But there is nothing in our pace that would line up with the new popularity of Formula 1 racing.

H. Today – as we return to Exodus 28 – which the campus pastors covered last week, focusing on the role of the High Priest, we are going to take another look at the Priest’s garment, using it as a launching point to explore determining God’s will.

I. This all pivots around Aaron’s robe.

1. He was the first full-on priest.
2. Moses is in charge of leading the people in peace and war, but Aaron – and then his descendants – have a central role in leading the people into the presence of God.
3. This is where the role of a priest get’s fleshed out. It’s worth noting, it’s not one you politicked for. You couldn’t buy it or gain it by popular vote. Aaron’s

descendants in particular, but the whole Levite clan in general, were set aside to represent the people to God. In his providence, God divided the three offices that Jesus will fulfill – prophet, priest and king – among different people.

IV. I am reading now: Exodus 28:15

A. **V15: Fashion a breastpiece – sometimes translated a breastplate, but do not let that make you think it’s a piece of armor. It’s cloth - for making decisions—the work of skilled hands. Make it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen.**

1. You should have heard yarn and multiple colors.

B. **It is to be square - a span long and a span wide (a 10” square) - and folded double. Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. The first row shall be carnelian, chrysolite and beryl; the second row shall be turquoise, lapis lazuli and emerald; the third row shall be jacinth, agate and amethyst; the fourth row shall be topaz, onyx and jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes.**

1. Twelve should get our attention because of the twelve tribes, and also because of the twelve disciples. Remember, Jesus will portray himself as the true and better Israel. This is all pointing to him.

C. **“For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold, like a rope. Make two gold rings for it and fasten them to two corners of the breastpiece. Fasten the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. Make two gold rings and attach them to the other two corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam just above the waistband of the ephod. The rings of the breastpiece are to be tied to the rings of the ephod with blue cord, connecting it to the waistband, so that the breastpiece will not swing out from the ephod.**

1. I realize, some of you are wondering, “What is going on here? I could be answering email, or reading up on the NFL draft. Or golfing. Or I could be doing my taxes. Or we could be in the New Testament. I mean... ephods? Gold rings?

2. Give me a minute. There is important stuff here. It’s worth noting that:

a) The fact of the tabernacle says something about God’s immediate presence;

b) The design of the tabernacle says something about how we approach him.

c) The details about the priest’s garment says something about the significance of the job – in particular how he represented the people to God, carrying their concerns before him.

d) And of course all of this will point to Jesus – our ultimate high priest

3. But we are going to focus on knowing his will, so let me keep reading:

D. **“Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord.**

1. This seems to have some sense of the need for the priest to carry the needs of the people into the room.

- E. Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron’s heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord.**
- V. So..., it’s not clear what we are talking about here.
- A. The insignia of Yale has the high priest’s breastplate – complete with the Urim and Thummim (which is not surprising, because all of the initial schools were Christian ventures in their founding), but the fact is, we do not know much about them.
- B. The guess is that they were gemstones that were carried by the high priest in or on the ephod and used by him to determine God’s will in some situations.¹
- C. Some claim they were stone that lit up. Some say they were like dice engraved with symbols for yes and no. There are other ideas. We just don’t get enough to go on. And what we do get makes it sound a bit like the Urim and Thummin was like the Magic 8 Ball that some of you may remember from the 70s.
- D. I think it’s worth noting that not everyone got their own. The Hebrew structure makes it clear that there was THE Urim and Thummin, not a set of them. This says something about authority in general, and the authority on the High Priest in particular. God could have given everyone their own.
- E. But we just don’t get enough to know what to make of this decision making process. But that doesn’t matter, because it is not what is in effect today.
- VI. Let’s turn there. Let’s ask the question: how do I ascertain God’s will today?
- A. I am not the High Priest. I do not wear his robe or have the Magic 8 Ball (well, I do. Syler game me one). But I want to know the right thing to do. How do I do it?
- B. This is the question. Indeed, I would say that knowing God’s will is one of the main things people want to talk with me about.
1. Should I: marry this person? Take this job? Buy this house? Major in Econ or finance? I want to do the right thing. I want to do God’s will. How can I know what to do? I keep asking him to make it clear. I ask him to write in on the clouds. He doesn’t seem to be doing that. How do I learn God’s will?
- C. Well, this is a big topic. I have been reading about God’s will - and thinking about how to discern it - for forty years.
1. For starters, I have had my own decisions to make.
 2. Secondly, the market is flooded with books and articles about making decisions:
 - a) Christian books (I probably have a dozen), and articles (I probably have read 200)
 - b) There are also non-Christian methods. There is a sense in which getting an MBA is all about learning to make better business decisions.
 3. I have a handful of pastoral observations.
- D. I want to make four points. But before we turn there, let me frame the discussion:
1. I need to note that some people get hung up on the idea of God’s will, because they conflate the two different concepts – and actually two different Greek words. Theologians make a distinction between the secret will of God and the revealed will of God. Deut. 29:29 reads:

- a) The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.
- 2. A lot of what we need to know is available to be known. It flows out of his character and is stated in his Word.
- 3. There are other aspects of God’s will that we cannot expect to know, because we are finite or because he does not tell us – but we can see it because it happened.
 - a) I do not want to spend too much time here. I will simply note that it was not God’s decreative will that Judas deny Jesus but it was his secret will. What he did was morally wrong (a sin), but it did line up with his overall plan.
 - b) We are not going down this rabbit hole, I simply want to note that the will of God is spoken of in two ways. .
- 4. I am not in the camp that argues that God has a secret, special plan, and if you make the wrong decision you’re sunk.
 - a) I’m a bit more of the mindset that says, many things do not matter. You want to have toast for breakfast instead of a hard boiled egg, great, fine, there is no need to make this a matter of great prayer.
 - b) Augustine said, “love God and do as you please.”

VII. Four Big Ideas:

- A. We need to rightly frame the goal. We need to realize that Knowing God > Knowing God’s Will
 - 1. I’m not suggesting knowing the right thing to do is wrong. But I am noting that some people want to draw close to God in order to know His will. That is a miss. Indeed, I suspect that part of the reason we don’t always get answers to our prayers to know God’s will is because He is using the crisis moment in our life to draw us to Him.
 - 2. Many people use God in an effort to get something better.
- B. We need to recognize and leverage the different tools He gives us to do this.
 - 1. We are no longer expected to use the Urim and Thummin. They do show up a bit later in the Old Testament. Saul and David and Nehemiah all use them. But we have moved on. Today we have three other aids.
 - 2. First - His word. We have something Moses and Aaron did not have – the Bible. And while it does not give specific counsel to you, it tells us most of what we need to know to live well.
 - a) Which means, if you are not a student of this book, you have cut yourself off from the primary way he is seeking to guide you.
 - b) Men and women, if you are a new Christian, you are forgiven for not knowing what it says. If you have been a Christian for several years but do not know it, what are you doing?
 - c) In all kinds of places, the Bible tells us what to do. Some are by the stories it tells – it helps us see how things work out. In some cases it’s very clear:

(1) In I Thes. 4 Paul writes: It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable⁵, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God;⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister..

(2) Later in the same book he says. You want to know what to do? You should: Rejoice always,¹⁷ pray continually,¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

(3) In John 15:12 . **My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**

3. His Holy Spirit.

a) Acts 1 contains the last time decisions were to be made without the Holy Spirit. They discussed qualification (used their mind) and then cast lots.

b) We need to learn to yield to the Holy Spirit and hear his voice. This is a big part of what growing in faith looks like.

4. Our mind – we need to think. We need to grow wise by paying attention to what works.

5. Other people – I am thinking here of friends and mentors: your small group! The elderly.

a) Proverbs 12:15 reads: The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice

VIII. There is so much more here

A. There is much that could be said about circumstances – they can be tricky. It is not always clear to me how to discern God’s hand versus temptations. And just because something is hard doesn’t mean it is wrong.

B. I think you need to know that part of what needs to happen is that you get to the point where you realize you really want to yield your life to God.

C. I believe we need to work hard to be doing our best on the path he has laid out. If the Lord has told you to do XYZ, I don’t think you can ask him for more info until you are working hard on XY and Z

D. We need to realize that we are not likely to get a perfectly clear answer, because part of what He is developing in us is faith.

E. We need to learn to hear God’s voice, although as with circumstances, this can be hard to discern. I have people tell me they are convinced that God is calling them to do something that His Word speaks against. There have been a few times when I thought I am hearing the voice of God. One was coming to this church –

1. We went to our small group and asked them to pray.

F. Let me also say, sometimes you have to do something, take a step.

1. I have a lot of books about discerning God’s will. The last two I read took very different approaches.

a) One said – pray, think and then act.

b) One said, pray think and then wait. The big point about the book was shifting into neutral. Not having an opinion and then waiting for God to make it clear.

2. I am more in the act camp.

a) ***Test-Driving a New Answer:*** When asked, “How can I know the will of God?” I tell people to: pray, study God’s Word, seek wise counsel, and then make a decision. I also say, “Don’t value the answer more than God” — i.e., don’t use God to get an answer. Use the need for an answer to drive you to God. I share this because recently, I overheard a pastor answer this question a bit differently. He instructed the questioner to “sit quietly and then respond to the ‘wisest and most loving voice’ that conforms with Scripture and engenders the Fruit of the Spirit.” I like his answer a lot. I fear it assumes that people are more conversant with Scripture and more self-aware than they are. But I like this answer.

b) I think that is what we see with Paul in Acts 16. Paul was moving and God redirected him.

G. But, let’s note the need for pray and think first. So, I am going to close by leading us in a prayer for God’s will – based on James 1:5. That passage – starting with verse 2 - reads:

1. **Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.**

ⁱ Urim means “lights” - and the Thummim means “perfections.”