

Excerpt from **Unsearchable Riches**

by Donald MacLean

(Sermon on *Christ the Priest*)

Now we are told about various items that the priest wore. As I've been saying, we can understand the garments for glory and beauty as representing Christ's holy humanity glorified, glorified in such a way that the glory of his divine person can shine undiminished. (You see, when the glory of his divine person shone through his humanity on the Mount of Transfiguration, it was not undiminished, as Peter and James and John could not have stood the revelation of his undiminished glory. Indeed the glory that shone there was overwhelming to them, even in his humanity which had not then made the atoning sacrifice.) But now, at God's right hand, in his glorified humanity, he still has work to do on behalf of his people.

One item that the priest had to wear was the ephod. Part of the ephod fell down the front and part fell down the back. The two sides were clasped at the shoulder. And on the shoulder there were two precious stones – onyx stones, which had the names of the children of Israel engraved on them.

This meant that when Aaron went about his ministrations, he was bearing on his shoulder the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. And what does that mean? It was intended to signify that in his person, *as the priest*, he was bearing them up, representing them, and acting for them. So it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. As the divine High Priest at God's right hand, he has on his shoulders (as it were) the names of his people, and he is there bearing them up in the presence of his Father. He secures for them that they will be borne up and that they will be carried through from the womb of the new birth to the Jordan of death, through the wilderness of time. Because of his work on their behalf, they will be carried through every trial, every temptation, every difficulty, and every burden until they cross the River Jordan into Immanuel's land. It occurs to me just now that we read also with regard to the Prince of Peace, that the

government shall be upon his shoulders. 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' He is governing for the people named on the two onyx stones. He is governing the world, he is governing providence, to preserve his people, and to see that not a hoof shall be left in Egypt. They shall all be brought, every one, with gladness great, and mirth on every side, into the palace of the King, and there they shall abide.

As it is described here, on the ephod there was also a breastplate, which was foursquare. On this breastplate there were also precious stones – in this case, twelve of them. These precious stones were set in four rows, three in each row. Engraved on these precious stones were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and this breastplate, we are told, was a memorial. That is to say, as the priest ministered in the Holy Place, he would have with him a memorial in the stones of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The high priest would carry this breastplate before the presence of God, and he would carry it upon his heart.

It is not immediately easy to understand why the two onyx stones were not enough, why there also had to be the breastplate and the twelve stones. Well, I believe it was for two reasons. First of all, because it indicates that our glorious high priest at God's right hand not only carries all his people on his shoulders to support them, but he carries them on his heart because he loves them. And since he has them on his heart, they are continually before the eye of his Father, for the Father loves them also. The other reason seems to be that whereas the onyx stones were two stones, on the twelve stones there is what we might call a more particular numbering of the people. This emphasises the fact that when Christ bears his people on his heart before the throne of his Father, he does not bear them as it were in the mass, but he bears them as though they were single, as though each one was there individually enjoying the fullness of his love and the fullness of his care. There is a particularity about Christ's intercession.

Many of the people of God may feel doubts about this great matter, whether

they are in the breastplate of the High Priest. Oh, they can believe that Aaron was there, they can believe that Moses was there, they can believe that Jeremiah is there, they can believe that Paul and Silas are there, they can believe that the people of God whom they knew in the world, whose fellowship they enjoyed, were there – but what about themselves? Well, the twelve stones on the breastplate emphasise the particularity of Christ's work, that is, that Christ bears every one of them – every one of them! – before his heart, as a memorial before God. Can they ever be forgotten? How could they be! The mountains shall depart, and the hills may be removed, but they will never be forgotten. They are before the throne of God in the heart of the High Priest, as a memorial. They can never be forgotten. There may be turbulences in the world, as there are even now over the Gulf War. But those who are among the tribes of the spiritual Israel, they're all on the breastplate, they're all in the heart of the High Priest, and they're all borne in love before the throne of the everlasting Father. As I was saying last Sabbath, he prays for them specially: 'I pray for them: I pray not for the world' (John 17:9).