

INTRODUCTION

I have been a pastor for 12 years now. It is indeed a special privilege to serve God. However, what I do will also affect my family. I am always curious how my 2 sons think about my calling. On separate occasions I asked them: “How do you feel when you tell others that your dad is a pastor?” My older son said he is proud of me. I asked him why. He stated that any child should be proud of his/her dad. Quite a standard answer. His brother said he is proud of me because I am serving God. I reminded him that people can serve God in any profession. As I look back, I have spent half of my life in U.S. already. For all those years, I faced two constant struggles – finance and immigration status. God tested my faith in those two areas. By His grace, I passed the exams. God is faithful. He provides for the financial needs of my family. Also, last year my wife and I became U.S. citizens. I take none of God’s grace for granted. It is truly a blessing to serve Him and serve you in this church. In the book of Numbers, God conveyed the same message to the Israelites that it was a blessing to serve Him. God chose Moses and Aaron to be leaders. Some rebellious people were envious of Aaron. Therefore, God disciplined those grumbling people. After the series of incidents, God reiterated that He only appointed Aaron and his descendants as priests. As we come to Numbers 18, God gave further stipulations about the priesthood system. You can picture a few concentric circles in your mind. In terms of the ministry assignments, the tribe of Levi was selected to serve in the tabernacle. Among the Levites, only Aaron and his descendants were picked as priests. The chapter also talks about the offerings God ordained. All the Israelites were required to contribute one-tenth of what God blessed them with. Those offerings would be given to the Levites to support their livelihood. Out of those tithes, the Levites had to present one-tenth to the priests. We see God’s kindness in this plan. Compared to the Israelites, we live in a very different society. However, the principle remains the same. God is always faithful to His servants.

EXPLANATION

1. 神選召祂的僕人 God Calls His Servants

First of all, God emphasized that it was He who called His servants and assigned them to their proper roles. He told Aaron in **verses 6-7**: 6 “I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the Lord to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. 7 But only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death.” From all the Israelites, God chose the Levites to serve in the tabernacle. They would be responsible to dismantle, carry and set up all the accessories. But among the Levites, only Aaron and his sons could be priests. They would present offerings before God. They would also supervise the work of the other Levites. Here, God added a stern warning of death to any person other than a priest who approached the sanctuary. Two chapters ago, Korah led other people to accuse Moses and Aaron. Korah the Levite in particular wanted to seize authority and became a priest. God’s judgment to those rebellious people was death. To prevent the same tragedy from happening, now the Levites had a new responsibility to guard the

tabernacle against any unauthorized encroachment. The penalty of death did not only apply to the trespassers but also to the guardians. Look at **verse 1**: ... “You, your sons and your father’s family are to bear the responsibility for offenses against the sanctuary, and you and your sons alone are to bear the responsibility for offenses against the priesthood.” The Levites would be penalized if anyone violated God’s command and stepped over the boundary. It is like the soldiers who protect a king will be held accountable if anyone sneaks into the palace. God reiterated that His holiness was not something that could be trampled. He is holy and humans are sinful. No one could enter the sanctuary without an atonement for sin. How blessed we are that we can come before God any time! We can worship God and pray to Him directly. It is all because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The author of the book of Hebrews put it this way in **10:19-20** of his letter: 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body. When Jesus breathed His last on the cross, He cried out: “It is finished!” Salvation work was completed through His death. When Jesus said so, the curtain in the temple was split into halves from the top to bottom. This curtain separated the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Among other items, the Ark of the Covenant was in the Most Holy Place. The Ark symbolized the presence of God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, only the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Most Holy Place. When God torn the veil, the symbolic meaning was that from now on anyone could come before Him through the blood of Jesus Christ. In Christ, our sins have been washed away and we are reconciled with the Heavenly Father as His children. As such, Jesus had replaced the role of a priest to serve as the ultimate mediator between us and the Father. There will be no need for a priest to offer animal sacrifice for believers. In Christ, we can access the Father directly as if we are called to be priests. **1 Peter 2:9** states: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. God grants us the role of priesthood, not to offer animal sacrifice, but with the privilege to draw near to Him. Every Christian has an intimate relationship with the Father. If believers are all called to be priests and we have Jesus the ultimate High Priest, then what are the roles of pastors? Of course, they are not only responsible for saying grace before we eat in the church. God calls pastors to be spiritual leaders of a church, under the direction of Christ. The apostle Peter encouraged fellow elders (another title in the Bible for pastors) in **1 Peter 5:2-3** this way: 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. Here Peter used the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep to illustrate the tasks of a pastor. A pastor should care for his church members, provide spiritual guidance, serve them and be a godly role model to them. Also, he has to do it with a cheerful heart, not for the sake of seeking financial gain or to dictate over them. It goes without saying that one pastor can only do limited work. He needs many coworkers to share his workload. Therefore, another responsibility of a pastor is to facilitate other church members to serve. Paul said in **Ephesians 4:11-12** that: 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. A pastor should recruit people to serve in the church, train them and help discover their particular gifts and talents so that they can put to good use the unique capabilities God gives them. Some churches call the laypeople “volunteers.” But I prefer to address them as “coworkers,” because they work together in the ministries God calls them to do.

2. 神供應祂的僕人 God Cares for His Servants

God is always faithful to His servants. God not only calls His servants to service He also cares for their needs. After God specified the work of the Levites and the priests, He told Aaron that He would also provide for their livelihood. Let us begin by reading **verse 20**: The Lord said to Aaron, “You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.” This instruction applied to the priests and other Levites. By “inheritance” God meant land and its resources. After the Israelites had conquered Canaan, they cast lots to determine which tribe would get which area. In your Bible there may be a map similar to the one on the screen. God emphasized that the Levites would not get any land. Instead, the Levites were given 48 cities and the surrounding pasturelands (see Joshua 21:41) that were scattered among the 12 tribes for their families to live. We have to keep in mind that people were farmers and herdsmen in the ancient world. If you do not have land then you cannot grow anything or raise any animal. How would the Levites make a living? God told Aaron: “No worry! I am your share and your inheritance.” How precious is that promise. The Levites should not be concerned about where to get food. As long as they faithfully did their work, God would take care of their needs. God accomplished that through the contributions of the other tribes. Look at **verse 21**: “I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting.” According to Leviticus chapter 27, the Israelites were required to give one-tenth of their harvest and their animals to the Lord. Those tithes were passed on to the Levites as a form of compensation for their services. Therefore, if the Israelites obeyed what God commanded them, then the Levites would never go hungry. Above and beyond that, God gave the priests additional compensation. Let us skip down to **verse 26**: “Speak to the Levites and say to them: ‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord’s offering.’” The Levites too had to offer a tithe to God from what they received. Where would that tithe go to? Read **verse 28**: “... From these tithes you must give the Lord’s portion to Aaron the priest.” That would also include all the priests who came after Aaron. When the Israelites presented their tithes, those portions had to be the best. They could not offer the leftover of what locusts consumed, or animals that only had three legs. Henceforth, the tithes that the Levites gave to the priests would be the best of the best shares. But there were more! God told Aaron in **verse 9**: “You are to have the part of the most holy offerings that is kept from the fire. From all the gifts they bring me as most holy offerings, whether grain or sin or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your sons.” According to the book of Leviticus, God dictated five main types of offering. In burnt offering, the whole animal was to be presented on the altar. Three other offerings are mentioned in this verse – grain, sin and guilt offerings. In these three offerings, only part of what was presented would be burned on the altar. The priests would keep the rest as their food. (References: Leviticus 2:3, 6:26 and 7:6) Those food could only be consumed by the priests in the sanctuary. Next, we will look at the fifth offering. Read **verse 11**: “This also is yours: whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the wave offerings of the Israelites. I give this to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it.” God was talking about the fellowship offering. It was a voluntary offering to express one’s thankfulness to God. Bread and an animal would be presented. The fat of the animal would be burned on the altar. To us, fat means cholesterol and heart attack. But in the Bible, animal fat is the best portion to be given to God. The person who presented a

fellowship offering could eat the meat with others as a joyful celebration. However, the breast and the right leg of the animal would be saved for the priests. God said in [Leviticus 7:34](#) – “From the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, I have taken the breast that is waved and the thigh that is presented and have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their perpetual share from the Israelites.” A priest would lift up those portions of meat and to wave it as a symbolic gesture of presenting it to God. Afterward, the priest would keep the meat and share it with his family. It is quite a lengthy background to cover. The general picture I would like for you to remember is that all the Israelites would present their tithes and other offerings to God. The Levites would keep some and the priests would get the best of the best portions. In this way, God cares for all His servants. The same principle of having a faith community to support the living of those who serve God was carried over to the New Testament. Paul said in [1 Corinthians 9:13-14](#) – 13 Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. Paul said that a church has the obligation to support the financial needs of its pastor. Even our Lord set up the same example for the church. [Luke 8:3](#) records: Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. In the gospels, Jesus’ disciples gave up all they had to follow Him. Some of them were in fact quite wealthy. There were four fishermen who had their own fishing business. Also, Matthew used to be a tax-collector. But they forsook everything and lived by faith. God supplied their needs through the love of other believers.

CONCLUSION

God is always faithful to His servants. I am one of them. All these years, the Lord has been providing for my family abundantly. I am far from rich according to the standard of the world. But God’s grace is always sufficient. Before I graduated from the seminary, I made a commitment to God and to myself that I would never talk about salary in my ministries. Whatever the church decides, then I will accept it with a thankful heart. When we called Pastor Bill, I did not participate in the salary discussion. I just reminded coworkers that they had to consider his previous years of service in other churches and his education level. I know sometimes money is a sensitive topic. But as I always say, if a lesson is in the Bible then we should study it. According to God’s Word, a pastor’s salary is not his wage. It is a means of financial support so that a servant of God does not have to worry about housing, food and other expenses. Even in U.S., there are many bi-vocational pastors who serve in small churches. They have to work a second job to make up for their limited income. I am so blessed by God that I have enough financial resources for my family. When you give an offering, part of the money will go to support Pastor Bill’s family and mine. God blesses you first, then you use what God gives you to bless your pastors. It is a beautiful thing. Therefore, do not think that our church is collecting a membership fee when we mention offering. If you have a correct understanding about offering, then I am sure that you will give with a cheerful heart. Besides money offering, many of you also give pastors your home-grown vegetable or home-cooked goodies. I accept all those gifts with a thankful heart. God called me to be a pastor. God gives you a different calling. But the principles I shared also apply to you. God provides for your needs, so that you can freely serve Him in the role He assigns to you. God sends you to your work place not only to earn money, but also to witness for Him. Serve Him with joy wherever you are.