

# The Meaning of the Tribe of Levi

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 01 October 2017

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[ 0 : 00 ] Good, well we come now to our Bible reading. So let's turn to Numbers chapter 3 and you'll find this I think on page 110 if you have one of our big church Bibles.

Numbers chapter 3 and I'll read first of all verses 1 to 20. And our subject for this evening is the duties of the Levites, the meaning of the tribe of Levi, why they were a distinctive tribe amongst the 12 tribes of Israel.

So Numbers chapter 3 verses 1 to 20. These are the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the Lord spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.

These are the names of the sons of Aaron, Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests whom he ordained to serve as priests.

But Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of Aaron, their father.

[ 1 : 15 ] And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest that they may minister to him. They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting as they minister at the tabernacle.

They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons.

They are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death. And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel.

The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast.

[ 2 : 28 ] They shall be mine. I am the Lord. And the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai saying, List the sons of Levi by father's houses and by clans.

Every male from a month old and upward you shall list. So Moses listed them according to the word of the Lord as he was commanded. And these were the sons of Levi by their names, Gershon and Koath and Merari.

And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their clans, Libni and Shimei, and the sons of Koath by their clans, Amram, Itzar, Hebron and Uziel, and the sons of Merari by their clans, Mali and Mushi.

These are the clans of the Levites by their father's houses. Now the next part of chapter 3, verses 21 through to 39, describes something of the duties and responsibilities of the three different clans of the Levites, the Gershonites, the Koathites, and the Merarites.

But I'll read just the last part of chapter 3 as well, and then we'll have that in Farsi as well. So picking it up from verse 40, and let's notice the theme of redemption particularly. So verse 40, And the Lord said to Moses, List all the firstborn males of the people of Israel from a month old and upward, taking the number of their names.

[ 3 : 53 ] And you shall take the Levites for me, I am the Lord, instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the people of Israel.

So Moses listed all the firstborn among the people of Israel as the Lord commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names, from a month old and upward as listed,

were 22,273.

And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle. The Levites shall be mine, I am the Lord.

And that's the redemption price for the 273 of the firstborn of the people of Israel over and above the number of the male Levites. Just look back to that in verse 39.

You shall take five shekels per head. You shall take them according to the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of 20 geras, and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are over.

[ 5 : 00 ] So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the people of Israel, he took the money, 1,365 shekels by the shekel of the sanctuary.

And Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the Lord as the Lord commanded Moses. Amen.

Well, let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Numbers, chapter 3, page 110 here in our hardback Bibles. Numbers, chapter 3, and our title for this evening is The Meaning of the Tribe of Levi.

I remember a bright Sunday morning some 10 years or so ago when our congregation was still meeting down the road in Buchanan Street. One Sunday morning, at the end of the morning service, I was standing just outside the front door of church.

And I noticed a young couple there whom I had not seen before. They were unfamiliar to me. So I greeted them and asked them their names. And he was a tall young Scotsman, about 6 foot 3, with broad shoulders, plenty of red beard and Harris tweed and that sort of thing.

[ 6 : 33 ] He was very Scottish looking. And his wife was about 5 foot tall. He told me his name first. I can't remember the name, but it was a very Scottish kind of name. And then she spoke up and she said, I'm his wife, Rachel, of the tribe of Levi.

I was speechless for a second or two. And then my brain began to work. And I said to her, do you mean that you're a Jew who has become a Christian? She said, yes, I am Jewish, but now I'm a Christian.

I don't know whether one or two of you remember that incident. But it was a very striking revelation. She was rejoicing in Christ as her savior, but she'd not forgotten her ancestry, which she was able to trace back to Levi, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

Now, our reading this evening, as you're well aware, is all about the Levites in the time of Moses in the 15th century BC. And our reading makes clear that this tribe of Levi is not at all like the other tribes of Israel.

It has a very distinctive role and it has distinctive duties. Let's notice these distinctive aspects of Levi in the text. In chapter one, if you just turn back to chapter one for a moment, the warriors of the various tribes of the Hebrews are listed and counted, beginning at chapter one, verse 20.

[ 7 : 56 ] Just have a look with me at chapter one, verse 20, and we'll do some counting together. So we have Reuben, verse 20. Next paragraph, Simeon.

Then Gad, that's three. Then we have Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, six. Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, that's nine.

And then Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, which makes 12. But, verse 47 says, the Levites were not listed along with them by their ancestral tribe.

So how many tribes were there? Well, it looks a bit like 13, doesn't it? But it's not really. Jacob had 12 sons. But Joseph, who is mentioned in chapter one, verse 32, the Joseph tribe is split into two tribes, often called the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

So if you put those two half tribes together, they count as one tribe, the tribe of Joseph, and then the tribe of Levi is therefore the 12th and not the 13th tribe. But the Lord says to Moses in chapter one, verse 49, don't take a census of the tribe of Levi, at least not in the way that you're counting the other tribes.

[ 9 : 10 ] And then if you look over to chapter three, verse 14, 3, 14, you'll see that the Lord does then command Moses to count the Levites, but it's a different type of census.

The Levites, chapter three, verse 15, are to be counted in terms of every male a month old and upwards, whereas the census of chapter one counts the men of 20 years old and older, those who are old enough to go to war.

So the other tribes are being counted as Israel's fighting force, whereas the Levites are not to be the warriors. They have a very different role to play. And as we look at what the Lord says about the Levites, I think we'll discover some important things about our God and his bigger purposes.

The Levites' role is a priestly role. And we need to know about the Jewish priesthood because it teaches us so much about the priesthood of Jesus, who is our great high priest.

And we don't have priests in the church today because Jesus has fulfilled and superseded the role of the human priests. He is the final priest, the ultimate priest, who puts an end to priesthood.

[10:21] He mediates between God and man. The idea of a priest is a go-between between God and man, and he has done that fully, finally, and perfectly. So when some of the churches these days do speak of their ministers as priests, and you'll find that, I think, in the Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic churches, and some of the Anglican churches, they're muddying the waters and obscuring the truth about the finality of the priesthood of Jesus.

Now, the Levites were not all priests. I say they were a priestly tribe, but they were not all priests by any means. To use a homely parallel, all poodles are dogs, but not all dogs are poodles.

Is that logic? Does that make sense? Now, in the same way, all the priests were Levites, but not all the Levites were priests. The first four verses of Numbers chapter 3 tell us that at this stage in Israel's history, the only priests were Aaron and his sons.

And in later generations, it was only the direct descendants of Aaron who were allowed to be priests. So the majority of the men of the tribe of Levi were not priests, but they had a very distinctive role in the life of Israel.

They assisted the priests. They were part of the priestly caste, if you like. And we have important lessons to learn from what Moses says about them in these early chapters of Numbers. Well, I've got three things, three headings for us tonight.

[11:48] First, the Levites teach us what it means to belong to the Lord. Let's look again at chapter 3, verses 11 to 13.

3.11. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Behold, I've taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel.

The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast.

They shall be mine. I am the Lord. Now, that's a very interesting passage, and it's an important one. It's not easy to grasp. But when we dig into it, it's very informative.

What the Lord is saying in verse 12 is that the Levites belong to him in a special way. The Levites shall be mine, he says. Now, you might ask, But don't all the Israelites belong to the Lord?

[12:54] And the answer is, yes, of course they do. The whole nation of Israel belong to the Lord. The whole nation of Israel was set apart from the Gentile nations and sharply distinguished from the Gentiles.

But despite that, there is something peculiar, something different about the Levites. They belong to the Lord in a different way. How? In the sense that they're substitutes for the firstborn of the other Israelite tribes.

Verse 12, I've taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of, as a substitute for, every firstborn who opens the womb amongst the people of Israel.

And it's all to do with the Passover. It arises from the Passover, as verse 13 explains. And the logic of verse 13 is this. On Passover night, that dreadful, memorable night in Egypt, the Lord was judging both Egypt and the gods of the Egyptians.

But he did not wipe all the Egyptians off the face of the earth. He could have done that, but he didn't. It was a selective judgment. He brought death only to the firstborn children of the Egyptians and to the firstborn of their livestock as well.

[14:06] Because in the Bible, the fate of the beasts is always closely tied to the fate of their owners. But in verse 13, the Lord explains that the striking down of the firstborn of the Egyptians entailed the taking to himself of the firstborn of the Israelites.

The firstborn Israelites are now consecrated to him. They become his special possession. And what this means is that the Israelite firstborn were just as sinful as the Egyptian firstborn.

In principle, they deserve death just as much as the Egyptians. But whereas the Egyptian firstborn were destroyed, the Israelite firstborn were protected by the blood of the Passover lambs, which

were sacrificed as their substitutes.

Now this means that if you were an Israelite firstborn, you would have had a great sense of relief and gratitude after the Passover, much more than your younger siblings.

You would have looked at the Egyptian households across the road, weeping and wailing the loss of their firstborn, and you would have realized there but for the grace of God go I. But thank God for protecting me by the blood of the Passover lamb.

[15:20] Now what verse 13 is saying is that the sparing of the Israelite firstborn meant that they were the Lord's possession in a special and particular way. God has accepted the blood that was shed in their place.

So he does not demand that they die. No, he demands that they live for him and for his service. But at this point, a further substitution comes into play.

And that is that the Levites take the place of the firstborn of the other tribes with the consequence that the Levites now owe a special debt of service to the Lord God.

They now have a distinctive obligation. Now you might want to say, but doesn't this all seem to be a very elaborate construction? Does it need to be as complicated as this?

The answer is yes. Because through this system of substitution, the Lord is showing us two things. First, how costly our redemption is.

[16:23] Because as the Apostle Peter tells us in his first letter, we were redeemed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

If it was costly for the Israelites to sacrifice their lambs, it was infinitely more costly for God to send his son into the world to shed his blood for his people, to die for them.

And therefore, how precious we are to him if God was prepared to give up his son like that. But then secondly, this system of substitution shows how deeply we now belong to the Lord.

As the Apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians, we've been bought with a price. Therefore, he says, we're to glorify God with our bodies. We now belong to him, both body and soul.

So the costliness to God of the redemption shows how much God loves us and the scope of the redemption shows just how much we now owe to him, namely, everything.

[17:30] Now back to these Levites, we might also want to ask, if the Levites belong to the Lord, does it mean that the other tribes of Israel don't belong to the Lord? And if the firstborn for whom the Levites are substitutes if they belong to the Lord, does it mean that those who are not firstborn are free of the Lord's ownership?

No, it doesn't. Let me read to you from James Phillips' commentary on numbers. The Lord's claim upon the firstborn was a symbol of his claim upon all the redeemed people.

He had redeemed them all out of Egypt so that they all belonged to him by right of redemption. But he claimed the firstborn for himself as a symbol of this fact.

This is rather like the claim he made upon the tithe or tenth of his people's goods and possessions, which was a symbol of the fact that everything they had was his and that what they retained could not be regarded as of right their own.

The Lord's claim upon the firstborn, therefore, is meant to signify that they really died in the Passover judgment so that they were not their own but bought with a price.

[18:45] That in this sense, they had no real right to be alive at all. Life for them was purely in the grace of God. Now, friends, doesn't this shape the way that we think about the Christian life?

It shows us that Christianity is not just some gentle philosophy and it's not an odd hobby for a few fanatics like pigeon racing or building model aeroplanes.

And it's not just an addition to the flavor of life like adding a little salt to your porridge. No, the Christian is a man or woman who has been redeemed and is therefore owned, body and soul, by a gracious Lord and Master.

That is the Christian redeemed. And therefore, the Christian has the obligation which is searching and yet very delightful of serving this Lord and Master right through to the end of life.

We belong to him always. Be faithful to the point of death, says Jesus in the book of Revelation, and I will give you the crown of life. We belong to him and that's why we learn to watch the way we live very carefully.

[19:57] we are now, because we belong to him, we're now his representatives. We're called by his name, Christian. And so it becomes our care and our joy to learn to please him, to learn with his

help to live a life of love and joy and peace and patience.

We're now, to use a metaphor that Jesus used, we're now yoked with him like two oxen yoked together under a plow. So therefore, our steps are in step with his steps.

So we learn such things as not to get drunk, not to have sex outside marriage, not to cheat or steal or lie. We learn because we're yoked to him. We learn truthfulness and honesty and hard work and how to live a life worthy of our privileged position.

We are redeemed. We're bought with a price. And nothing compares with this, the joy and the honor of it. Who wants to be a president or a prime minister or a millionaire or a pop star if he could be a Christian instead?

Think of the apostle Paul, one of the greatest intellectuals that the world has known. He rejoiced to call himself a bond servant of Christ, a slave of Christ. There's a great irony there.

[ 21 : 13 ] To be enslaved by men is the greatest humiliation, but to be a slave of Christ is the highest honor. God. So there's the first thing. The Levites teach us the principle of belonging to the Lord by redemption.

Then secondly, the Levites teach us that the presence of the Lord is holy and to be feared. Their duties are spelled out to us in great detail in these chapters, but the word which really sums up their responsibility best is the word guard.

Just look back to chapter 1 and verse 53. 1.53. And the Levites shall keep guard, shall keep guard over the tabernacle.

End of verse 53. They shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony. That's really the heart of their duty. Look at the earlier part of the same verse. The Levites shall camp round the tabernacle of the testimony.

Why? So that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. Now we won't look at all these details verse by verse, but in the central section of chapter 3, the bit that I didn't read out, the Lord gives instructions about how the campsite of the Israelites was to be arranged.

[ 22 : 36 ] And it's all very precise. In the center of the camp, the very center, the tabernacle is to be placed. The tabernacle which symbolizes God's presence in the midst of his people.

And then, I think we looked at this last week, but let me just remind you. The 12 tribes are very carefully arranged around the tabernacle. They had to set their tents just right. So there were three tribes to the north facing the tabernacle, tent flaps to the tabernacle, three tribes to the east facing the tabernacle, three tribes to the west, three to the south, all facing the tabernacle.

But the Levites are to camp right in the middle, immediately around the tabernacle, between the 12 tribes and the tabernacle. Now, the Levite tribe is subdivided into three clans because Levi himself, the son of Judah, had three sons called Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

So the Levite clans are called the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites. And these details are described in chapter 3. And we learn from chapter 3 that the Gershonites were to camp on the west side of the tabernacle, the Kohathites on the south side of it, the Merarites on the north side of it, and on the east side of it, chapter 3, verse 38, Moses and Aaron and Aaron's sons were to camp. Why? To guard the sanctuary itself, to protect the people of Israel. And the verse goes on, 338, any outsider who came near, that's anyone who's not a Levite, was to be put to death.

[ 24 : 13 ] So the Levites are positioned between the tabernacle, the symbol of God's very presence, and the other Israelites, and woe betide any Israelite who presumed to come too close.

Now, if you were an Israelite who was not a Levite, you would be wise to be very careful. So unless you were a total fool, you would keep your distance from the tabernacle. Now, the three clans of the Levites also had carefully specified duties, which are outlined briefly in chapter 3, and then are developed in detail in chapter 4.

Now, chapter 4 is long, but let me just give you a flavor of it. Look at chapter 4, verse 5. When the camp is to set out, in other words, when they've been camping for a while, and now it's time to move on, when the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the Ark of the Testimony with it.

And the following verses describe how only the priests, not the other Levites, but only the priests, Aaron and his sons, may actually touch the holy things, the Ark of the Testimony, which contained the Ten Commandments, the table, the altar, the cups and plates and flagons and so on.

So their job is to touch them and then to cover them before everybody moves off, they're to cover them and wrap them up in special blue and scarlet cloths prior to breaking camp.

[ 25 : 38 ] Everything has to be wrapped up and covered before it can be carried on the march. Now, verse 15 of chapter 4. When Aaron and his sons have covered and wrapped up all these things, the Kohathite Levites are to carry them.

But, verses 18, 19 and 20, these Kohathites have got to exercise great care. Their job is to carry these holy things, but they've got to carry them with all the coverings on them.

They mustn't look at them, even for a moment, as verse 20 puts it, lest they die. And then as you read on, you see that the Gershonite clan has a different set of duties from the Kohathites and then finally the Merorite clan also have a distinctive set of duties.

So it's the priests who have the primary access to the holy things and the Levites, as their assistants, do the fetching and carrying. But all the other Israelites have to stay well clear.

Now, what is God teaching us through these detailed regulations? Does it all seem a far cry from the Christian church today? Well, really it's not. It teaches us something very important about the gospel and how wonderful the gospel is.

[ 26 : 55 ] The message of these chapters is that God's presence is to be feared. To blunder into his presence, to touch the things that he describes as most holy, is a transgression to be punished not by discipline but by death.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, says the book of Proverbs. And these chapters teach us something about the fear of the Lord. You may remember a strange incident from the life of King David as told in the second book of Samuel.

The Ark of the Lord, that's the Ark of the Testimony which contained the Ten Commandments, the Ark had been captured by the Philistines. It was a disgraceful incident and it had happened many years before but the Philistines had had the Ark.

But David, when he came to reign as king, he gradually subdued the Philistines and once he'd established himself firmly as king, he decided that the Ark had to be brought back to Jerusalem. So he went to fetch it. It was then housed with a man called Abinadab and he'd been looking after it for some time. So the Ark, with David right there with it, the Ark was placed on a cart and the cart was pulled by oxen and they set off towards Jerusalem.

[ 28 : 09 ] And the two sons of Abinadab, whose names were Uzzah and Ahio, they were driving the cart. You'll find the story in 2 Samuel chapter 6. But at one point in the journey, the road was obviously rough and difficult and the oxen stumbled and the Ark was threatening to fall off the cart.

And one of Abinadab's sons, the young man called Uzzah, stretched out his hand to steady the Ark and to stop it from falling off the cart. And he was struck down there on the spot by God and died.

The passage says, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah and God struck him down there because of his error. And he died there beside the Ark.

So what was his error? Well, the answer is, he was not a Levite. So he was forbidden to touch the Ark. God was showing that the threats of death issued in the book of Numbers were not idle threats. Those who had close dealings with the artifacts that represented the very presence of the Lord had to obey his instructions with bated breath. Now just think on in history, a generation or so, to the building of the temple in Jerusalem.

[ 29 : 22 ] The temple was built by David's son Solomon. And the function of the temple was exactly the same as the function of the tabernacle had been. The tabernacle, if you like, had been a small portable version of the temple.

But the temple was there in the center of Jerusalem as a permanent great building to represent the very presence of the Lord with his people in the promised land. But you couldn't blunder into the temple any more than you could blunder into the tabernacle.

The temple was essentially a system of barriers. Gentiles were not allowed to come in at all.

Ordinary Jews could only go so far.

Priests could go a bit further inside when they were on duty. But the holiest place of all, the Holy of Holies, right in the center of the temple, could only be accessed by the high priest and only once a year.

So there was a great ambiguity about the temple. It said on the one hand, God is present with his people. But it said on the other hand, you cannot enter his presence.

[ 30 : 29 ] How can an uncleansed sinner enter the presence of a holy and pure God? But the moment that Jesus died on the cross, the Gospels record that the great thick curtain in the center of the temple, the curtain that sealed off access to the presence of God was torn in two from top to

bottom.

And what does that mean? It means that the Lord, because of the death of Jesus, commands us now to come in. Because the death of Jesus cleanses us from every stain of sin and makes us pure in the sight of God and therefore acceptable.

So the Levites are guardians. It's not so much that they're guarding the tabernacle. Really what they're doing is guarding the people, lest God should strike them down because of their disobedience.

Now this role of guardianship shows us just how wonderful the Gospel is. God is inaccessible without the death of Jesus. But with the death of Jesus, the door is open to us.

As the old song puts it, there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open and you may go in. At Calvary's cross is where you begin when you come as a sinner to Jesus.

[ 31 : 54 ] Many ecclesiastical architects have not really understood this. In England, many churches and cathedrals, I think this is probably true in Scotland as well, but in England certainly, many churches are designed in such a way as to suggest that the barriers are still up.

A typical English parish church or cathedral has its main body separated from its top end by some kind of ornate screening. The screen is generally made of carved wood or wrought iron, but it's a substantial thing.

It looks like a real barrier and it suggests that the punters and the grunners, that's us, can sit down in the main part while a few special people, usually in floating robes, can occupy the top end.

And the suggestion is that the presence of God is somehow located at the top end of the building.

Now that kind of design misrepresents the truth of the gospel. All you need to have in a church building is a desk or pulpit like this from which the Bible is read and preached, a table to serve the bread and the wine at the Lord's Supper, and seats for the people to sit on and preferably a roof overhead to keep the rain off.

We don't need anything else. Access is now granted. But let's rejoice in that fact with bated breath because we don't deserve it.

[ 33 : 14 ] It's all of God's grace. As Paul puts it in Romans chapter 5, through Jesus, we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

God was under no compulsion to tear the temple curtain in two. It's by his grace and love that we're invited into his presence. We're now third.

The Levites show us how to serve the Lord in humble ways. There's a great variety of duties which the Lord's people need to undertake, and it's the Lord who assigns the appropriate duty to the appropriate person.

So let's notice some examples here in Numbers 4, verse 25. Numbers 4, 25, where the Gershonites are told what to do.

Their job is to carry the curtains of the tabernacle and all sorts of other things, goat skin covers, hangings and screens and cords and so on. So they're porters. How about the Merorites?

[ 34 : 20 ] Look at verse 31. They're responsible for the frames of the tabernacle, the bars and pillars and pegs and cords. And at the end of verse 32, a better translation would be, just look at the end of verse 32, a better translation would be, you shall assign to each man by name the items that he is to carry.

So this means that every individual Levite had his own specified role and task. What an honor then to be a Levite with your own specified box of pegs.

Now this has always been the way of the Lord with his people. The service of each one in their place is essential to the proper functioning of the whole. When you look at these chapters in Numbers, you might think that the Merorites have the lowliest and most inferior of the tasks, pegs and pillars and accessories.

But the fact is that each man is by name assigned the items that he is to carry. That's a great principle for us to learn and practice in the body of the church. In the church that we used to belong to at Burton-on-Trent before we came here to Glasgow, there were two middle-aged women in the congregation with the name of Frieda.

They were known as Big Frieda and Little Frieda. Now Big Frieda's role in the congregation was to make the hot drinks at the end of the evening service. She lived about a mile away from the church building and every Sunday Big Frieda could be seen trudging along that mile carrying a heavy bag

which I knew contained milk and tea and tea towels.

[ 35 : 57 ] And she once said to me, you know, most of the folk in our church, they've got such obvious gifts, but I've got no gifts. All I can do is make the tea. So I looked at her, I said, Frieda, what you do for our church is a very great gift.

You don't just make the tea, you oil the wheels of friendship and love. You stand there beaming behind the tea table at the back and that makes people want to drink the tea which is, by the way, delicious.

And then they stand around with their teacups for a long time and then they do what they are supposed to do which is to talk to each other. They help each other in their joys and sorrows. Your service in the church is an essential part of our evangelism and our church life. You may not be an evangelist yourself, but what you do undergirds every aspect of the church's work. It is invaluable. Now most of us, for most of the time, get on with things in the life of the church which are not seen by many people. So we're like the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merorites.

[ 37 : 01 ] But each of us, if I can put it like this, has a bag of pegs with our name on it. And if we don't look after those pegs, nobody else will.

Now this is a theme that runs right the way through the Bible. The Apostle Paul writes this in Romans 12. As in one body, there are many members and the members do not all have the same function.

So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. This is how the Lord's people function. So when we've discovered our own particular niche and role, let's do the tasks involved and let's do them willingly and enthusiastically.

If you haven't yet found your niche, you will find it if you're willing to serve. Just occasionally, Christians can get jealous of each other because somebody else's role seems to attract more notice or more praise.

A Merorite can be jealous of a Gershonite. When that happens, usually when you look down, there's injured pride somewhere at the bottom. Each of us needs to accept our limitations.

[ 38 : 09 ] We all have limitations. But each of us has our very own bag of pegs. So let's thank God for the role of the Levites. They show us sublime things and they show us homely things.

They open up for us the great truths of redemption and substitution. They show us how glorious it is to be given access to the grace and forgiveness of God.

And they teach us humble service. I'm very much looking forward to that cup of tea a little bit later and to the conversations that go along with it.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. we thank you so much dear Heavenly Father that there is no greater honor, no greater joy and blessing than to be a servant of yours, a bond servant, a slave of Christ.

And we pray that you'll help each of us to find our own particular niche of service and that you'll help us to give ourselves to it unstintingly, willingly, and gladly and that you will build up the body of Christ and enable all of us together to share this wonderful good news of a Savior who brings forgiveness.

[ 39 : 28 ] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.