

The Glorious Summons to Service

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[0 : 0 0] Good. Well, let's turn now to our Bible reading, which is in the book of Numbers, chapter 8. Numbers, chapter 8. And you will find this in the big Bibles on page 117.

We're continuing in our journey through Numbers. We've been in Numbers on Sunday evenings, but with Willie being away for a week or two, we've got a couple of Sunday mornings in Numbers. So Numbers, chapter 8.

And this is largely about the preparation of the Levites, the men of the Levite tribe, to do their particular service of looking after the tabernacle and all its furnishings.

But there are great applications for Christian people as well. So Numbers, chapter 8, and I'll read the whole chapter. Now, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and say to him, When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand.

And Aaron did so. He set up its lamps in front of the lampstand, as the Lord commanded Moses. And this was the workmanship of the lampstand. Hammered work of gold.

[1 : 1 5] From its base to its flowers, it was hammered work. According to the pattern that the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the people of Israel and cleanse them.

Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them. Sprinkle the water of purification upon them, And let them go with a razor over all their body, And wash their clothes and cleanse themselves.

Then let them take a bull from the herd, And its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil. And you shall take another bull from the herd for a sin offering. And you shall bring the Levites before the tent of meeting, And assemble the whole congregation of the people of Israel.

When you bring the Levites before the Lord, The people of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord as a wave offering from the people of Israel, That they may do the service of the Lord.

Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, And you shall offer the one for a sin offering, And the other for a burnt offering to the Lord, To make atonement for the Levites.

[2 : 3 3] And you shall set the Levites before Aaron and his sons, And shall offer them as a wave offering to the Lord. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, And the Levites shall be mine.

And after that, The Levites shall go in to serve at the tent of meeting, When you have cleansed them and offered them as a wave offering. For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel.

Instead of all who opened the womb, The firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken the Levites for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, Both of man and of beast.

On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated them for myself. And I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel.

And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel, To do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting, And to make atonement for the people of Israel, That there may be no plague among the people of Israel, When the people of Israel come near the sanctuary.

[3 : 44] Thus did Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the people of Israel to the Levites. According to all that the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, The people of Israel did to them.

And the Levites purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes. And Aaron offered them as a wave offering before the Lord. And Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them.

And after that the Levites went in to do their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and his sons. As the Lord had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, So they did to them.

And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, This applies to the Levites. From twenty-five years old and upward, They shall come to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting. And from the age of fifty years, They shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more.

They minister to their brothers in the tent of meeting by keeping guard, But they shall do no service. Thus shall you do to the Levites in assigning their duties.

[4 : 53] This is the word of the Lord. And may it be a blessing to us this morning. Well, let's turn again to Numbers chapter 8 on page 117.

My title for this morning is The Glorious Summons to Service. Well, first of all, some details to orientate us as to what is going on here at this particular point in the story of the Old Testament.

The date, approximately 1440 BC. The place, the wilderness of Sinai, the personnel, the people of Israel, the author and leader, Moses.

The situation. Now, at this stage, some 13 months have passed since the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea, since the Exodus itself. Moses, in the meantime, had been up the mountain on Mount Sinai, receiving the law of God.

And he is now teaching it to the Israelites and putting it into practice. As they prepare to set out on their great march, their journey towards the promised land. The journey is actually going to start.

[6 : 11] We're almost there now. It'll start at chapter 10, verse 11. Now, chapter 7 has been all about the tabernacle, the portable tent, which speaks of God dwelling with the Israelites and ruling them by his word and forgiving them through the sacrifices offered at the tabernacle.

That's a good way to think of the tabernacle. Dwelling, ruling and forgiving. Now, this chapter 8 that we're looking at is still about the tabernacle. There's a short opening section here on the tabernacle lampstand in verses 1 to 4.

And it's followed by a longer section, which describes the actual commissioning of the Levites, the men of the Levite tribe, to serve in the tabernacle. So this chapter will help us to understand what a wonderful thing it is to serve God, to serve the Lord.

The message comes to us in patterns which are strange to us, the patterns and forms of Old Testament Israel. But it has much to say also to the church of New Testament times.

So we'll take it in two sections. First of all, verses 1 to 4 about the lampstand. And then secondly, the cleansing of the Levites, the preparation of the Levites in the second part of the chapter.

[7 : 24] So first of all, verses 1 to 4. Light is received so that light can be shed. Now, when you first look at this little paragraph, you wonder what on earth is going on.

And you wonder why Moses should trouble to write about the lamp and the lampstand. After all, what is light to us? We take it very much for granted. And we think of it in a very utilitarian way.

We need to have it, of course, in our homes and places of work and a building like this to light up everything that we're doing. But this particular lampstand here, it's not just utilitarian.

It has a very powerful symbolic significance. Symbolic for the Israelites back then, but also symbolic for Christian people today. So, as the dog said to the bone, let's work together at this and we'll see if we can crack out some nourishment.

This lampstand here mentioned is a seven-branched candelabra. The seven lamps you'll see are mentioned in verse 2. Jewish people today would call this the menorah.

[8 : 30] And you may be familiar with the shape of the Jewish menorah. You sometimes see it in films or in Jewish houses in the front window. But the idea is that you have three lamps or three branches of the candelabra on each side of the central stem.

And then you have a seventh cup right at the top. And each of those seven cups has its own personal supply of olive oil to light it. Now, there are some lovely little details here in these first four verses.

You'll see that verse 4, well, it's about artwork. It tells us that the lampstand is made of hammered gold. And there's a mention of flowers there as well. There's no need to turn this up, but there's a much fuller, longer description of the lampstand in Exodus chapter 25.

And that goes into details about the cups at the end of each branch. They're to be made like almond blossoms, each with a calyx, which is a little sort of tube and a flower at the top.

Now, we know that the law of Moses is very strong against idolatry and against graven images representing false gods. But it's not against art. Art, of course, used to serve idols must be bad art.

[9 : 40] But art in the service of the Lord, like this art, is good art. In fact, this art, as verse 4 makes clear, is art designed by the Lord himself. It's the very pattern which the Lord had shown Moses.

The Lord himself is the artist. And the Exodus 25 passage says that it's the pattern that was shown by the Lord to Moses up on the mountain. So when he went up onto Mount Sinai, he didn't only receive the Ten Commandments from God.

He received everything else as well, including the precise instructions about how to construct the tabernacle, all its fittings and furnishings, and this lampstand.

But let's notice the main thing here in verses 1 to 4. Let's look back to verse 2. The instruction to Aaron is to set up this seven-branched lampstand in such a way as to give light in front of the lampstand.

And when you read the fuller details in Exodus and Leviticus about how the tabernacle is to be arranged, you realize that just in front of this lampstand, there is to be placed the gold-covered table on which 12 loaves of freshly baked bread are to be arranged every day.

[10 : 52] They had to bake 12 loaves every day. It was called the showbread, and it was set out on the table in a kind of heap. And these 12 loaves of bread represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

So you have here a great symbolic arrangement. There is light from the Lord illuminating and falling upon the 12 tribes of Israel.

God is the light shed upon his people. Now, this is a great theme that runs right the way through Scripture, this theme of light for God's people from God himself. Let me give you a few examples.

In the Psalms, David says to God in Psalm 18, In Psalm 27, David says, The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Whom shall I fear? Isaiah chapter 60. Here the Lord is speaking through the prophet to the people of Israel. He says, Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has arisen upon you.

[11 : 56] The nations, that's the Gentiles, shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. And do you remember what Simeon said when he came into the temple that day when Mary and Joseph had brought the baby Jesus into the temple to dedicate him?

Simeon picked up the baby, and he says to God, with the baby in his arms, he says, My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory for your people Israel.

Jesus, of course, is light. As John puts it, John the Evangelist, in his first chapter, In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Jesus says of himself in John chapter 8, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. John the Evangelist, in his first letter, writes this, God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Or think of Jesus up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. He became all dazzling brightness. At the very end of the Bible, at the end of the book of Revelation, John is speaking about the city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven.

[13 : 17] And he says, The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Jesus is the lamp of the city. By its light shall the nations walk. The Apostle Paul, in his letters, speaks of Christians as children of light who have renounced the darkened thinking and darkened lifestyle of paganism.

Now, as you think of all these scriptural uses of the idea of light, there are two important ideas, two dominant ideas involved, life and understanding.

So life, just as the sun's light enables life to flourish on the earth, so the Lord's light brings life to Christians. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

Or as Charles Wesley puts it in his famous carol, light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Life. But also, understanding in the sense of light for our brains and our hearts.

[14 : 26] Understanding to the otherwise darkened mind. When Jesus says, I'm the light of the world, he goes straight on to say, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness.

So the light that Jesus sheds upon us takes away our moral blindness, enabling us to see how to put one foot after the other, how to progress through life.

We're no longer morally blind men and women. Once we've come to Christ, our minds become illuminated. We begin to see what human life is all about. We're like children who are learning to walk.

But it doesn't stop there. Because the Jesus who says, I am the light of the world, also says to his people, you are the light of the world.

People don't light a lamp, he goes on, and place it under a basket. Of course not. They place it up on a stand. So it gives light to everybody in the house. In the same way, he says, let your light shine before others, before men.

[15 : 27] So, the purpose of Old Testament Israel is to be a light to the Gentiles, to draw them to the one true God. And in the same way, the purpose of the New Testament church, the Christian church, is to be a light to the world, to the non-Christian world, which is much loved by God, but is stumbling about in darkness until it sees how to live, how to walk, in the light of Christ.

Now friends, isn't this a glorious challenge to us, to be light like this? The challenge is to shine brightly, for the church to shine brightly, in the face of the moral darkness of the world.

We're to be like a lighthouse, that sends its beam out, across the dark and turbulent waters. But it's challenging, really in two ways. First of all, all of us start out dark, in the dark, if you like, and grubby.

Would you like to know, my friends, what my heart is like, by nature? Well Jesus has told me, what my heart is like. Out of the heart of man, he says, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, this is me, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

That describes the heart, that I was born with, and I suspect it describes the heart, that you were born with as well. Well, we all start out in the bogs and swamps, of moral darkness. People don't always realize this.

[16 : 58] I remember once meeting a woman, aged about 60, who said to me, I've never sinned. I was speechless. I didn't know what to say. I said to myself, how can a person live so long upon this earth, and deceive herself so thoroughly?

Now, God loves us so much, that he is determined, to send his searchlight, into all the dark corners of our hearts, until we acknowledge our sinfulness, and then learn to repent.

Now, of course, it is a lifetime's process. It doesn't happen overnight. But as we allow his light, to shine into, not just into our hearts, but into the very darkest corners of our hearts, he will then help us to see, the sinfulness of sin, and to learn to repent of it.

It's a wonderful thing, to have God's searchlight, the light of the Bible, shining into our hearts, day after day. But it's very challenging, because it always calls us to repentance, and repentance always means, change.

So there's the first challenge, to allow God's light, to reconstruct, and to reform, our interior moral life. But the second challenge, is for the church, the Lord's people, to have the courage, to live, as the light of the world.

[18 : 17] This light, as Jesus says, is not to be hidden away, under a basket. It's to be set up on a stand, set up on high, so that everybody else can see it. So the church, is under orders, not to retreat, into a kind of Christian ghetto, and keep its light, under a basket.

I wonder if you sometimes, have the temptation, to retreat out of this world, altogether. Do you sometimes think, how nice it would be, to build a Christian village. We call it the Tron village.

And we build this village, somewhere out in the countryside, maybe in the deepest, darkest depths of Ayrshire. Or some such place. In this lovely village, we could have a nice little school.

We could build a school, to protect our children, from the world. We could have our own farm there. We'd have goats for milk, and chickens for eggs. We could grow wheat and barley, to make our own bread.

And of course, we'd have a nice big, communal meeting room. And Willie Philip, could teach us the Bible, for half an hour every morning, and half an hour again, every evening. And we could blow a raspberry, at the horrid old world, and tell it to get lost.

[19 : 25] Just retreat into a kind of ghetto. But the fact is, we cannot build heaven on earth. Heaven is for heaven, and heaven is for the future. While we're here on earth, our job is to shed light, in the dark, painful, sorrowing, complicated, God-avoiding society, that we live in.

The challenge to us, is to outlive the world. To live better, than the non-Christian world. So that the non-Christian world, can see the light, as they look at the quality, of the lives of Christians.

So that they can see in us, the lovely qualities, of truthfulness, trustworthiness, the willingness to keep promises, to stick to our word, honesty and hard work, sexual purity, the honoring of marriage, the kind of family life, where children and parents, love each other, and enjoy each other.

A willingness to be, helpful, and cheerful, and good-humored. A willingness to support the weak, and to care for the broken. As Jesus says, let your light, so shine before men, that they may see, your good works, your shining lifestyle, and then give glory, to your father, who is in heaven.

Not to give glory to us, but to give glory to him, because they can see, that the transforming power, is his. A body, a Christian body, committed to that kind, of biblical lifestyle, is a powerful weapon, in the hand of the Lord.

[20 : 51] So back to Numbers chapter 8, verse 2. This light, is to fall forward, from the lampstand, in such a way, as to light up, the twelve loaves.

If the people of Israel, back then, are full of light, the Gentiles, will be drawn, to the one true God. And if the Lord's church today, lives a life, of shining integrity, we will be noticed, and people will be drawn, to Jesus, who is the light of the world.

So there's the first thing, light is received, so that light can be shed. Now second, servants, are consecrated, so that servants, can serve.

And this brings us, to the longer section, on the Levites, from verse 5, to verse 26. Now we met the Levites, a few weeks ago, in chapters 3, and 4 of Numbers.

And back there, you may remember, Moses was describing, their role, their duties, how they were to look, after the tabernacle. They were the ones, responsible for its furnishings, and for moving it.

[21 : 56] So whenever the Israelites, were on the march, the Levites had to pick up, the tabernacle, and carry it, or transport it, on the ox-drawn wagons, and so on. Nobody else, but the Levites, was to touch the tabernacle, on pain of death.

But this passage, in chapter 8, is different. This is not describing, the duties of the Levites. This chapter, records the ceremony, by which the Levites, are consecrated, for their service, and are actually, launched into it.

So that, at verse 22, we read, after that, after this ceremony, the Levites went in, to do their service, in the tent of meeting, before Aaron, and his sons.

So this chapter, records a ceremony, which is a little bit, like the commissioning, of a group of officers, to serve in the armed forces. Or a service, at which we admit, new members, to the congregation.

We had one, just a week or two ago, didn't we? Everyone stands up here. They're admitted, into fellowship, into the congregation, by the minister. They make public promises, to serve the Lord, and the church.

[22 : 59] And then, well, tally ho, they're launched, into service. They're recognized, as servants of the church, and of the gospel. Now this ceremony, of consecration, or dedication, in Numbers chapter 8, is very instructive.

It's rather complex, but it teaches us, something very important, about the life, of the servants of Christ today. So let me try, and describe this ceremony. I'll take you through, much of the passage.

I'll try, and describe it, as clearly as I can. It is dramatic. You don't necessarily, see that as you just read it, but it's dramatic, and it's full of symbolism. I mean, right at the heart of it, is having two bulls.

Can you imagine, two bulls in here? It would be terrific, and slaughtering them. Anyway, that's all part of it. So it is a dramatic thing. It makes dramatic points. So here it goes.

Step number one, take the Levites, from amongst the people. Verse six, that's the first thing. In other words, call them forth, as a group, to be publicly identified, before all Israel.

[24 : 02] Here are the Levites. Step number two, cleanse them, is the command in verse six. How cleanse them? Verse seven tells us, sprinkle water on them, have them shave themselves, and wash their clothes.

So it's an external, symbolic cleansing, to express an internal commitment, to purity. Now you might ask, why this business of the razor, all over the body?

Well, probably because in those days, before we had nice shampoos, and medicated chemicals, a manly, hairy chest, could conceal livestock. Lice, et cetera.

So I think that's probably, the reason for it, but it's cleansing anyway, cleansing. Step number three, take two bulls, from the herd, for sacrifice. Verse eight, step number four, bring the Levites, to the tent of meeting, that's the tabernacle, and assemble, the whole congregation, of Israel.

Verse nine, now that's important, because it, it shows that the ceremony, is not a private thing. It's to be publicly witnessed, by everybody, because, it concerns, everybody.

[25 : 15] The Levites, represent the whole people, of Israel. Now step number five, the people of Israel, verse 10, and that must mean, a group of people, representing the 11 other tribes.

They then step forward, and lay their hands, on the Levites. Now we'll consider, just what that means, in a moment. Step number six, Aaron, the chief priest, now steps forward.

Verse 11, he lifts up his hands, and he waves them, back and forth. This is what's called, a wave offering. And he's standing, between the Levites, which are behind him, and the tabernacle, which is in front of him, looking, as it were, to the place, where God dwells.

And this action means, that Aaron is presenting, the Levites, as an offering, from the people of Israel, to the Lord, so that the Levites, should do the service, of the Lord, in the tabernacle.

Aaron effectively, is saying to the Lord, Lord, here are the Levites, cleansed, and prepared for service. And the people of Israel, are presenting them to you, as a sacrificial offering, so as to serve you.

[26 : 24] Step number seven, from verse 12. The Levites, then take the two bulls, they lay their hands, on them, they slaughter them, and offer them up, as sacrifices to the Lord.

For what purpose? Look at the end of verse 12, to make atonement, for the Levites. Then in verses 13 and 14, Moses sums up the ceremony, driving home the point, that the Levites, are thus offered to the Lord, cleansed, set apart, and dedicated.

And after that, verse 15, they can go into the tent of meeting, and start their service. Now the next few verses, verses 16 to 19, explain the reason, why the Levites, are particularly, the possession of the Lord.

We've just read in verse 14, the Levites, shall be mine. And we had that back, in chapter 3 and 4, didn't we? The Levites are mine, says the Lord. So why is this? Why are they peculiarly, his?

Well, verse 16 tells us, look towards the end of verse 16. Instead of all who opened the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them, the Levites, for myself.

[27 : 37] And the reason behind that, comes out in verse 17. And it's to do with the night of Passover, in Egypt. On the day, verse 17, on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated them, that's the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites, instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel.

So the reasoning, I think, runs like this. This is the thinking. On Passover night, as you know, the Lord killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, both human beings and animals, man and beast.

That was a terrible but righteous judgment from the Lord, against Egypt and their gods. But the firstborn of the Israelites, living in Egypt, were spared.

The Lord passed over them. That's why Passover is called Passover. The Lord passed over them, and did not kill the firstborn of the Israelites. Why not? Well, they deserved to die, because they too were sinners.

But they were protected from the judgment of God, by the blood of the Passover lambs, which had been daubed across the door frames. The Lord saw the blood, and stayed his hand.

[28 : 51] But because the Lord had specifically spared them, he regarded the firstborn Israelites, as being specifically his. He had saved them from death, in the Passover judgment.

That's why they belonged to him specially. They were his. They were his, to put it in Pauline language. They were bought with a price. They were not their own. Atonement was made for them, by virtue of the lambs, being substituted for the firstborn of the Israelites.

Now, of course, all the Israelites, from all 12 tribes, were redeemed out of Egypt. They all belonged to the Lord, by right of redemption. But he claimed the firstborn for himself, as a symbol, of the fact that all of them, belonged to him.

But he didn't put those firstborn Israelites to death. He then claimed, the service and dedication of the Levites, instead of, as a substitute for the firstborn.

So we have a double substitution going on here. First of all, the lambs are offered, as a substitute for the firstborn of Israel. And secondly, the Levites are offered up, as a further substitution for the firstborn.

[30 : 03] Now, when we come here to Numbers chapter 8, something similar is happening. First, the Levites lay their hands on the bulls, identifying themselves with the bulls for sacrifice, in verse 12.

But secondly, in verse 10, the 11 tribes, lay their hands on the Levites, thus identifying themselves with the Levites.

So the bulls atone for the sins of the Levites, and the Levites, pressed by the hands of the 11 tribes, represent and symbolize the service of the whole nation.

It was the whole nation that was redeemed in Egypt, and now the whole nation, represented by the Levites, who are cleansed by the sacrificial bulls, are giving themselves in service to the Lord.

So the whole thing is a dramatic ceremony, which pictures the consecration of the 12 tribes, the whole people of God, to his service. The principle here is the principle of identification.

[31 : 05] The Israelites were identifying themselves through this laying on of hands with the Levites in their consecration. They recognized the Lord's claim on the Levites as being a claim on all his redeemed people.

In other words, they all belonged to him. Now we today, Christian people today, we stand in the same relationship to God through being identified with Jesus as our Passover lamb, the lamb who has shed his blood to atone for our sins.

And we are, if we're Christian people, we are deeply identified with Jesus, deeply. Paul, for example, says to the Galatians, I have been crucified with Christ, identified with him so deeply that I think of myself as crucified with him.

He says to the Colossians that Christians have been raised with Christ. He puts the two together, the crucifixion and the resurrection, in Romans chapter 6.

He says we, we Christians, were buried with Christ by baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[32 : 19] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. So if we're Christians, we are identified with Jesus Christ up to the hilt, up to the neck.

And Paul goes on to say in Romans 12 that our only proper response to all this is to offer our bodies, all that we are, as living sacrifices to the Lord.

It's on this basis that we are gloriously summoned to the service of the Lord Jesus. In fact, the author of the letter to the Hebrews in chapter 12 says to all Christians, you have come to the assembly of the firstborn.

Interesting phrase. You have come to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. So every Christian in the sight of God is counted as a firstborn. That's why we owe him our joyful and wholehearted service.

Well, friends, a bit of practicality. How is this going to show itself in our lives? What are the marks of this joyful dedication to service? I'm sure many marks could be mentioned, but I'll just mention two.

[33 : 29] First of all, we learn to serve the Lord and not ourselves. Now, that may sound obvious, but it's a harder lesson to learn, I think, today than it might have been a generation or two ago because of the atmosphere in which we live in society today.

Our culture today is always emphasizing the importance of serving oneself. So, for example, people will say, find out who you are.

Discover yourself. Identify who you are and then identify the kind of lifestyle that you want to live and then pursue your self-made goals for all you're worth.

Live for yourself. Be yourself. Fulfill yourself. Gratify yourself. Love yourself. Look in the mirror and love what you see there. Now, the trouble is that we rapidly become whatever, we become like whatever we worship.

And if I worship what I see when I look in the mirror, I'm going to have a shriveled and withered kind of existence. I am a sinner. I would be mad to worship myself.

[34 : 39] It would stink, wouldn't it? It would be like shoveling more and more muck on the dunghill if I were to worship myself. But once we begin to turn our eyes away from self and we begin to look long and hard at Jesus Christ, inevitably, we become more and more like him.

To study him, to fill our minds with his thoughts, with his values, with his teaching is to be ennobled. It's to have our humanity enriched. We can fear, especially when we're young, that we shall lose out if we don't worship ourselves.

But the truth is absolutely the opposite. We might fear, especially when we're young, that the service of Christ might cramp us and shrivel us, that we'll be little shriveled prunes by the age of 30.

But it's not living by the Lord's teaching that makes us shriveled human beings. It's the person who thumbs his nose at the Lord, thumbs his nose at the Ten Commandments. He's the one who loses out hand over fist.

Just to think of a few of those Ten Commandments. If I murder people, I end up in jail for years. If I steal, I become a person that nobody can trust and nobody can respect.

[35 : 54] If I tell lies, I cut off the possibility of having open and loving relationships with other people. If I commit adultery, I wreck marriages, my own marriage and other people's.

Sex is for marriage. Sex within marriage is delightful and joyful. Let me tell you that's the great secret. People don't believe it, but it's true. Adultery involves deceit and lies.

It can only diminish a person's well-being and trustworthiness. Now, learning to serve the Lord and not ourselves, it's not something we do in order to be happy.

We do it for his sake. We do it because it's right and he commands it. But the great byproduct is that it does bring us great happiness and great freedom from guilt and shame.

So there's the first thing. To follow in the footsteps of the Levites is to learn to serve the Lord and not ourselves. But secondly, the Levites teach us to be spiritual non-conformists.

[36 : 58] The whole body of the Israelites laying hands on them are committing them to serve the Lord and by definition that commits them to reject paganism, to be non-conformists as far as paganism and all its values is concerned.

As you know, the Israelites were constantly tempted to espouse the values of the pagan nations who lived around them. They often did espouse those pagan values and whenever they did, their lives became wretched, and the Lord sent painful judgments upon them so as to bring them back to himself and to help them to rediscover the joy of obeying him.

And to be a Christian involves a fundamental non-conformity with the values and beliefs of the world in which we live. Now, friends, take a deep breath, stiffen your spines, square your shoulders, and say in your hearts, if you will, I am serious about following Jesus Christ.

And I am serious, therefore, about being a social non-conformist. And I pray that my non-conformity with the world around will be perceived by my non-Christian friends as something true and attractive and that it will draw them to Christ.

Let me say this, especially to encourage younger people. it does get easier as you get older to be a non-conformist. When you're young, inevitably, there's a lot of peer pressure.

[38 : 30] Peer pressure is a big thing. And your own character when you're young is still pliable and plastic. It's in the process of being formed. But every time you take the bold route, every time you take a non-conformist stand on something, you set yourself a personal precedent.

We set ourselves good habits as well as bad ones. Every time we take a stand, we set a precedent for ourselves and we deepen our personal habits of non-conformity.

Let me just give a few examples of what the young Christian will not only think inside the head, but will be prepared to say out loud in the presence of non-Christian friends.

Okay? Here are a few things. I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe that I'm a sinner and therefore I need to be saved and I believe there is a Savior.

I do not think that the answer to life's great questions lies in my own heart. I do believe that Christianity is the only way to God the Father, that Jesus is the only way.

[39 : 45] I believe in marriage and that marriage is between a man and a woman. I believe that same-sex sexual activity is wrong and a denial of God's loving purposes for mankind.

I believe that abortion is murder. and that's not an exhaustive list. There are many more things but if as a young Christian you are willing not only to think such things inside there but to say them in any company, you are taking your stand with Christ and you're practicing non-conformity with the world.

You might say, but to say that sort of things that would be death to me. well okay then, die. It's all right. It's what we're called to do. Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was put to death by the Hitler regime in 1945 said, when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.

What did Jesus himself say? Whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will live.

It's what it means to be a Christian. It's what we're called to. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much for the teaching in the Bible in so many parts of the Bible about service.

[41 : 25] What a glorious thing it is to do and yet also costly and challenging. We pray that you will help us to heed the call of our Lord Jesus to deny self, to take up the cross, to be prepared as it were to walk out of the city and be crucified and to follow him in his footsteps.

Please take each of us, dear Father, and use us as servants. Cause us to be light to the world that people may see our lifestyle and be attracted and be attracted to our wonderful Saviour and Lord.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.