Shoulders, Heart And Hands

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church
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Some of you might remember Pastor Glen Coon, who always opened his sermons with a poem that began, "Lord make me a nail on the wall, fastened securely in its place. And from this nail, so tiny and small, hang a bright picture of Your face." That's what we need today; a picture of Jesus!

Today I want to share with you a fascinating and encouraging picture of Jesus' love for you. You know that He cares for you, don't you? Take a look at how the Scriptures illustrate this great truth. First we'll start by reviewing some instruction given to Moses regarding the garments that his brother Aaron, as the high priest, was to wear.

"You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to sanctify him, that he may minister to Me as priest. And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash.

"You shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone, and the remaining six names on the other stone, according to their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial." Exodus 28:2-4, 9-12.

In the "sign language" of the Bible, God is telling us something. Aaron was to serve as a "priest." What did that mean? What was Aaron's function as priest? He was to represent the people before the Lord. He was to minister to them in His behalf. He was to carry their needs before God. Through the ministry of the blood of the sacrifice, he was to assist in the process of the sins of the people being forgiven. He was counselor, guide, teacher and judge. He acted in the place of God toward the people. That's a high calling!

In this capacity, the priest was but a dim reflection of the role of Jesus, Who the Bible tells us is our High Priest. Earthly priests had their failings; Aaron failed to live completely to this lofty calling. His sons Nadab and Abihu profaned their ministry by offering non-consecrated fire before the Lord. Eli was less than stellar in his occupying of the role, and so on. Nevertheless, God instituted the office of priesthood so that we could learn of His love and compassion.

What about today? While we don't observe the priesthood of Aaron in the Christian Church, we recognize that God has called each one of us to serve as "priests". The "priesthood of all believers" is an understanding the Church has long embraced.

So, when we look at how Aaron was to serve, we are learning how Christ ministers, and how we also are to minister. What is the message of the engraved stones on the shoulders and heart? It shouldn't be too difficult to see that the **names of Israel were on the priest's shoulders as a sign of *strength***. It says the names on the stones were there as a "memorial." What does that mean? It means that as the priest went before the Lord, the names on his shoulders were a ***reminder*** of those he was bringing before Him.

That they were on his "shoulders" points to "strength." See how well you do on this short Bible quiz having to do with "shoulders."

Genesis 24:15. Who came to the well to meet Eliezer, Abraham's servant, carrying a pitcher on her shoulder? (Rebekah)
Exodus 12:34. When the Israelites left Egypt, what did they carry on their shoulders? (their clothes)
Numbers 7:9. What was the *only* way in which the Ark of the Covenant was to be transported? (on the shoulders of the Levites)
Joshua 4:5. What did Joshua command a member of each tribe of Israel to do when they crossed the Jordan? (take a stone from the river, put it on their shoulder to carry and construct a memorial)
Judges 16:3. Who pulled down the gates of Gaza and carried them away on his shoulders? (Samson)
Isaiah 9:6. Of Whom is it said, "The government shall be upon His shoulder? (Jesus)
Isaiah 22:22. Of Whom is it said, "The key of the house of David I will lay on His shoulder?" (Jesus)
Isaiah 49:22. A prophecy of Isaiah pictures who being carried on shoulders? (daughters)
Luke 15:5. How does the Good Shepherd carry the lost lamb? (on His shoulders)

When Aaron bore the names of the children of Israel on his shoulders, inscribed on those onyx stones, the Bible is telling us, in picture language, that the priest, as representative of Jesus, was the strength of the people.

Do you remember, when you were young, being hoisted up on the shoulders of your dad? It felt pretty good, didn't it! You felt secure; you felt loved. He did it with such ease, because he was very strong. Aaron, as the priest, with the names of Israel on his shoulders, is a picture of Jesus carrying you on His mighty shoulders. He is your Strength.

Don't put your confidence in the power of money: God is your Strength!

Don't trust in the horsepower of cars or machines: God is your Strength!

The might of muscles will eventually give way: God is your Strength!

The clout of friendships will often disappoint: God is your Strength!

What does the Bible say about *our* strength? "My strength fails because of my iniquity." Psalm 31:10. "I am like a man who has no strength." Psalm 88:4. "When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Romans 5:6.

There are at least 33 different words used in Hebrew that are translated "strength," referring to the might of God!

> "I will love You, O LORD, my strength." Psalm 18:1.
> "I will go on in the strength of the Lord GOD." Psalm 71:16.
> "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Psalm 46:1
> "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You." Psalm 84:5.
> "God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect." II Samuel 22:33.

The very name "Elohim," a name of God appearing often in the Old Testament comes from a root meaning "power." He is called "The Strength of Israel." I Samuel 15:29. Is He your strength? Are you clinging to the promise of His power with your name on His shoulders?

Are you often overcome with doubts and fears? He is your strength! Are you assailed by temptations and trials? He is your strength! Do you feel weak and unworthy of eternal life? He is your strength! Picture *yourself* as the lamb on His shoulders; see *your* name on the stones on the shoulders of priest.

What can we learn by the fact that the names were written in *onyx* stones? Onyx is a type of quartz, called "cryptocrystalline" because it is made up of such minute crystals that its crystalline nature is only vaguely shown, even when examined by

microscope. True onyx is rather hard (given a "7" on the Mohs scale of hardness), and somewhat rare. It can be found in many shades of color, many times appearing in banded colors, such as white, tan or brown. Pure black onyx also occurs, but not as often. The word "onyx" comes from an Assyrian word meaning "ring," probably because it was used as jewelry. Think of those characteristics and relate them to how God looks at you: diverse, complex, and precious. You are His "jewel"!

Competent artisans were commissioned to inscribe the names of the children of Israel on those two onyx stones, placed on the shoulders of Aaron. It's understandable to see how craftsmen can do such quality work today, with modern machinery available. But how did they do it back then? I don't know, but in places like the British Museum I've seen artifacts from ancient times, going back to the times of Moses, which are amazing in their detail and quality.

According to one source, before inscribing or engraving, the stone to be used was dressed by chiseling and polished it by rubbing it with another stone having a smooth surface. The letters were then written on the surface of the stone with ink or a piece of chalk or painted with brush. Finally, the engraver incised the letters on the inked or painted portion." http://www.groupsrv.com/religion/post-1854036.html

There might be some "chiseling" and "polishing" work needing to be done to remove the rough edges, but remember, He bears *your* name on His shoulders in His ministry as Priest above. He wants to be your Strength.

As His follower, as an apprentice "priest," you are called upon to be a source of strength and encouragement to others. You are called to "carry" someone else whose strength is failing. You are called to be the "jumper cable" to give a boost to a brother or sister who is weak. You might be called to "carry" a brother or sister, weak in faith, like the four who brought the paralytic

before Jesus. The Gospel injunction is "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2. Do you have the name of someone, whom you bear on your shoulders when you come before the Lord in prayer?

The shoulders of Aaron were not the only places where the names of the children of Israel were found. "You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold and blue and purple and scarlet thread, and of fine linen thread, you shall make it. It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width. And you shall put settings of stones in it…. They shall be set in gold settings. And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes. So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the LORD continually." Exodus 28:15-21, 29.

It shouldn't be too difficult to see that the **names of Israel were on the priest's shoulders as a sign of *strength*, and on his heart as a symbol of *affection*.**

In the "sign language" of the Bible, this is telling us that Jesus carries *your* name on His heart as He ministers in the sanctuary in heaven. With deepest love, with the most tender care and compassion He seeks to give assistance to His children. How deep this love is, is expressed in human terms in the Bible so that we can gain a glimpse of His agape love. He declares Himself to be a "jealous" God. This, contrary to the analysis of some, is not jealousy or envy in the sense prohibited in Scripture. It just means that He is anxious to safeguard that which He has purchased by His blood. Life and death are at stake in the great struggle, the *agonia* of this conflict. Jesus, as your Creator and Redeemer has strong feelings for your ultimate well-being, your redemption. Can you blame Him for wanting so desperately that His children be saved from death?

In Scripture He is presented as the divine Lover. The Lord has at times compared His love for us to that of a parent. We catch a glimpse of that in passages such as "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget; yet I will not forget you." Isaiah 49:15. The parable of the lost son is an example of God's love compared to that of a father. The love of a parent can be amazing, and God's love for us is all of that.

At the same time, God compares His affection to that of a lover. Both types of love can be genuine and compelling, and yet a there is a difference. They are not quite the same thing. Mother's love speaks of protection, nourishment and desire for the best. A lover's affection may well include these but also includes an intimate and personal dynamic not contained in the former. There's an attraction, a heart glow toward that special one that can't be explained entirely by science. What is it that causes that magical attraction, that chemistry of courtship? We recognize the difference between "love" and "being in love."

There's an identifiable radiance when one experiences love in this dimension. God has compared His love to that of a lover. Do you remember when love bloomed in your heart, and you couldn't keep your mind of that particular person? Every waking moment was spent either being with or wishing you were with the object of your affection. An inward smile that couldn't be stifled put a sparkle in your eyes. But then, if the relationship hit a rough spot, ouch! Your heart felt pain.

Believe it or not, God spoke of His feelings (using human terms) toward us by this vocabulary. He reacted like someone "jilted" to Israel's idolatrous affections. Look at this amazing verse. The Lord said "I was *crushed* by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols." Ezekiel 6:9.

Let your mind dwell on that word "crushed" for a moment, and try to imagine how God feels when we don't respond to His generous offers of affection. It's as if we had "stood Him up." Have you ever experienced such a feeling? Has it ever been that you've had thoughts and feelings toward someone and those feelings weren't returned? Or maybe for a time they were and then a change in the relationship occurred. You knew how it felt to be "crushed." That's how God feels toward us! He takes it very personally! His heart aches like a rejected lover when we set up our modern day idols and find other interests that occupy our time and energy so that we have none for Him.

He carries *your* name on His heart in heaven! What a wonderful picture is this! Do you carry the name of someone on your heart today? When you pray, do you bring those whom you love into His presence? I can't explain why our prayers move the arm of the Almighty. But the Bible tells us that

> The church prayed and Peter was delivered from prison
> Job prayed for his erring children
> Abraham prayed and Lot was rescued from Sodom
> Moses prayed and the Israelites were spared from destruction
> Elijah prayed and the rains came

Last Wednesday evening, as we were starting our prayer meeting, the church phone rang requesting that we pray for something. One of our church family was on a skiing outing and had lost his cell phone, containing hundreds of business contacts, on the slopes. Could we pray that the lost phone be found? Of course we did, as I'm sure many others also did.

Finding a cell phone on the ski slopes might not be the easiest thing, but I'm glad to report to you that the next day I received an email informing us that while on a ski lift, a man had looked down and seen it (which seems miraculous in itself!), and when he got off the lift he skied to the area, reached down a 12"

hole and picked it up. It had been there through the night, but seems to work fine. An answered prayer! (The kind man refused a reward for his good deed!)

Does God care for our cell phones and the other things of this life? Yes, He does! But I have news for you. He's much more concerned about our souls! Cell phones won't be going to heaven, people will. Yes, we can bring our prayers to Him regarding our lost "things" but we really need to be praying to Him for our souls and those of our friends! We ought to be praying more for those we love! As "priests" we need to have the names of our families, friends and loved ones on our "heart" when we approach the throne.

To do this effectively, we must love souls. It has to matter to us that someone is not walking in the light. In our human, natural condition, this type of concern doesn't exist, but God can put love for others in our hearts. Concerning the ruins of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah lamented, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" Lamentations 1:12. So God asks, "Does it matter to us that others haven't received salvation? Does it matter that others aren't walking in the light and living for Him? Does it matter that others aren't ready for Jesus to come in the clouds?

Someday soon, Jesus is going to come, according to His promise. Is there someone you know that hasn't received Him as their Savior, whom you can "carry on your heart" to Him in prayer today? Don't underestimate the power of intercessory prayer! It might seem that the results are meager, but you can't see what's happening in someone's heart. It might seem like nothing is happening and time is going by: keep praying for those you love!

Samuel was disappointed that the people of Israel craved a king, instead of recognizing God as their Ruler. Look at what he said, and see if there's not a message for us in this verse. "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should *sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you*." I Samuel 12:23.

I’m told the Edwards family was blessed by those who served the Lord in many faithful and beneficial ministries. Josephine Cunnington Edwards was a prolific author of mission stories. Some of you have read her stories. Her son Bob Edwards sang in the Voice Of Prophecy Quartet for decades. I’m sure some of you have heard him sing. But one of the Edwards family, Josephine’s brother Bill didn’t walk with Lord. In fact, He wanted nothing to do with religion, and his life bore no resemblance to the shining witness of other family members.

Meanwhile, Josephine continued to pray for her brother. She did something else; she involved her small church in praying for him. Then one day Bill’s wife found him in tears. He explained, “I heard the door open behind me. I turned around, and—Oh, Mary, it was the Lord! I knew Him by the nail prints in His hands. No picture can ever portray the love in His eyes. He said `Bill, I have a special request I have to make of you. I have 50 years of prayer for you to answer for. Your parents went to their graves believing that they would never see you again in the kingdom. Bill, I would love to have a grand surprise for them when they get to heaven. Won’t you give your life to Me so that I can present you to them there?’” Within weeks Bill was baptized. “If you had seen Jesus,” he said, “you could never refuse Him anything that He asked of you.” (http://www.thequiethour.org/cgi-bin/wohtrans/wohtrans04.cgi?date=2/15/2004)

Don’t let the devil prevent you from doing your priestly duty by discouraging you, telling you you’re not worthy. Elijah was a man of “like passions as we are” yet his prayer was heard. Repent and confess your sins, then claim His promise of forgiveness and present your claims boldly before Him. God forgive us for our weak and puny prayers! Before Aaron and the other priests served, there was a sacrifice for them, and then they could minister and intercede for the needs of others. Then bring your loved ones before the throne. Imagine yourself with the group you’re praying for, in the very presence of Jesus in heaven. Remember that prayer doesn’t bring Him down to us; it brings us

up to Him. Picture yourself presenting the needs of those you carry on your heart in His presence.

The day will come when we'll realize we should have been doing much more praying. All our hours spent in foolish and frivolous pursuits will appear as wasted then.

Jesus carries *your* name on His shoulders before the throne, as an emblem of His *strength*. He carries *your* name on His heart in heaven as a token of His *love*. These, the earthly priests did as representatives of Christ. But there is another place He carries your name that the priests down here never were asked to do. Jesus has inscribed *your* name on His palms as a symbol of *sacrifice*. "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands." Isaiah 49:16.

Solomon's wife said to her husband that her love for him was "as strong as death." Song Of Solomon 8:6. That's quite a comparison, but Jesus' love for you is *stronger than death*. He proved it on the cross! The scars in His hands will forever tell the story of His great love for us. The Gospel song reminds us that "when He was on the cross, I was on His mind."

Someday, by His grace, you'll be able to touch the scars in His hands, and you will fall at His feet in gratitude and worship. We may be asked to sacrifice for others, but we'll never be asked to do what Jesus did. He gave up a royal throne and the companionship of adoring angels to come here. All of our sacrifices seem small and insignificant in comparison with His.

Do you see in this picture the story of Jesus' love for you? Your name is on His shoulders, for He is your strength. Your name is on His heart, because He loves you dearly. Your name is on His hands, because He gave all so that you could be with Him. Do you love Him today? Will you care enough to love others and carry them before Him in prayer?