

YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE

1 Peter 2:4-10

Key Verse: 2:9

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

From the beginning of his letter, Apostle Peter praised God who has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Then, he exhorted us to crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it we may grow up in our salvation. Now he deals with the identity problem. In chapter 1, he called the scattered believers **“God’s elect,” “exiles”** (1:1), and **“foreigners”** (1:17). Now he declares **“...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession...”** (2:9). To those who had been scattered by persecution—and seemed to have lost everything because of their faith—it was most vital to know who they were, why they were persecuted, and how they should live. Then, instead of feeling confused and displaced, they could have a sense of dignity and live powerful lives as Jesus’ witnesses. The identity problem is a deep-seated issue within every person. We seek to understand who we are in various ways: through the eyes of others, subcultures we associate with, or in terms of our career, possessions, traditions, family or nation. For some it is through their demons or sin-sicknesses. We can’t find our true, lasting identity in these things. But we can find it in God. When we know our true self we can live authentically with a clear direction and sense of purpose. Furthermore, this shapes our character and guides our destiny in the right way. Through this message, let’s listen to what God tells us about who we are to him.

I. As you come to Jesus, the living Stone (4-8)

Peter’s words in verses 4-8 reflect the temple and sacrificial system of Israel. In verse 4a, the words, **“As you come to him,”** remind us of God’s repeated invitation to his people to come to him. But it was not easy for them. There was a huge gap between them. God is holy and we are sinful. God lives in unapproachable light; no one has seen him or can see him (1 Ti 6:16). People felt that if they saw God they would die. In order to come to God they needed some kind of mediation. So God provided a high priest, the temple and the sacrificial system. In the temple there was a “Most Holy Place,” where God’s presence dwelled. From there he spoke to the people. No one

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could enter there, except the high priest once a year. Outside was the Holy Place, which ordinary Jews were allowed into. But Gentiles were not; they had to stay in the outer court. Inscriptions written on stone were mounted around the Holy Place, warning that Gentiles would be killed if they entered.¹ This system of mediation was fulfilled by Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). This indicated that people could now come to God directly through Jesus, who became the perfect sacrifice, our great high Priest, and the temple itself (Jn 2:21; Heb 4:15; 10:14). Jesus is the new and living way opened for us, you and me, to come to God (Heb 10:20). The author of Hebrews invites us, “...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings...” (Heb 10:22a). We can come to God freely, anytime, anyplace. Let’s enjoy this great blessing and privilege.

“As you come to him” means to have a personal relationship with Christ. This is an ongoing process of knowing him. We should never think of it like going through a “drive-thru,” just to grab and go. Rather, we enjoy life together with Jesus. Who is Jesus? Peter calls him “the living Stone.” This is an oxymoron. Stones are inanimate objects that are unchanging and hard. But this stone is living. In what sense is Jesus the living Stone? Jesus has life in himself. John 1:4a says, “In him was life....” Jesus is the Creator God; he is the source and author of life. All life originated from Jesus, comes through him and is for him (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). Jesus is also the life-giver to those who believe in him (1 Cor 15:45). Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (Jn 11:25-26a). At the same time, Jesus is like a rock that is immovable. He is our refuge and our firm foundation, personally and for the church (Mt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:11).

In verse 4b Peter writes about the living Stone: **“rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.”** This indicates the character of the living Stone: rejected by people, but chosen by God. At birth, Jesus, though he is God, was not welcomed into the world, but laid in a manger. He began his messianic ministry in Galilee, known as a despised Gentile territory. He called fishermen and an outcast tax collector as his disciples. Even his hometown people rejected him on the basis of his human background. During his ministry he was branded as a **“glutton and a drunkard.”** The religious

¹ http://www.bible-history.com/gentile_court/TEMPLECOURTWarning_Inscription.htm

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leaders slandered him as “**demon-possessed.**” Finally, he was falsely accused, tried, condemned to death and hung on a cross—the most cruel and cursed way of execution. On the cross Jesus was rejected by everyone. Why was Jesus rejected in this way? It was because of our sins. Isaiah said, “**Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities**” (Isa 53:4a,5a). This was God’s will: “**...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all**” (Isa 53:6b). People did not want a Messiah like that, but a victorious champion who would feed them, secure them, and give them military victory. When Jesus did not satisfy their demands, they rejected him. But God chose Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus was very precious to God because he obeyed God and fulfilled his salvation plan. This is a pattern of God’s work in history. In Acts 7, Stephen spoke to the Jewish religious leaders, reminding them that Joseph was rejected by his brothers, but chosen by God. Moses was also rejected by his own people, but chosen by God. In the same way Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders but chosen by God. So don’t be surprised when you are rejected by people. It may be painful for a while, but it is probably a good sign. The important thing is to be chosen by God. When we are despised or unrecognized, we should not be discouraged, but come to Jesus.

As we come to Jesus, the living Stone, what happens? **First, he makes us like living stones and builds us into a spiritual house (5a).** In the past we were dead because of our sins, like dead stones or the Rolling Stones. But when we come to Jesus, he breathes life into us and we become alive. If you know Jesus, you are a living stone and can live a vibrant, dynamic life by the power of God. Everyone wants this kind of life. If you don’t have it, come to Jesus, the living Stone. God does not make living stones into decorations. Rather, he uses them to build a spiritual house. “**Spiritual house**” is a metaphor which describes the church universal. It is the dwelling place of God, the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22 say, “**...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**” Sometimes we feel insignificant and useless. We may think that our life doesn’t matter to God. When we look at ourselves, we feel wounded, broken and weak. But God placed us exactly where he wants us, to accomplish his own purpose and increase the beauty of his work. God is calling and using each of you to build his spiritual house which is invisible, ever expanding,

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growing—not static. Jesus, the living Stone, is the source of life for all of us little living stones and he positions us where he wants us and relates us to each other. God is the great Designer and the master Builder who makes a beautiful and awesome spiritual house. It is a great mosaic of people from every tribe and language on earth. If we scrutinize each part, it may not seem special. But when we step back and see the whole picture, it is a dazzling work of art displaying God’s love, wisdom and power. We are precious and valuable to God and collectively we are God’s dwelling place.

Second, he makes us a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices (5b). Peter called the early Christians “...**a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**” (5b). They may have looked like scattered refugees. But to God they were holy priests who reflected his own holiness. In the Old Testament, priests offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. God accepted their sacrifices, forgave their sins, restored relationship with them and blessed them. The shedding of blood was essential for the forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22). Now, those who believe in Jesus have assumed the ministry of priests. Since Jesus was sacrificed as the Lamb of God once for all, we no longer make animal sacrifices. Rather, we proclaim what Jesus has done by sharing the gospel with others. Those who accept the gospel receive forgiveness of sins and God’s blessing. As a holy priesthood, we not only proclaim Jesus’ sacrifice, but each of us also offers our own life to God as a living sacrifice (Ro 12:2). Though we may look insignificant in this world, we are very important people, because God is expanding his house and blessing the world through us.

In verses 6-8, to help scattered believers recognize the firm foundation of their faith and have true security in Jesus, Peter quoted Old Testament scriptures. First, he quoted Isaiah 28:16 and applied this to believers. Then he quoted Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14 and applied them to those who do not believe. The key word in these references is “cornerstone,” which refers to Jesus. The cornerstone is the first stone set in a foundation, which all other stones will be set in reference to, and it determines the position of the entire structure. When the religious leaders rejected Jesus, they rejected God’s cornerstone and his whole plan of salvation.

There are two responses to Jesus, and each has a critical consequence. To those who believe, Jesus is precious. Scripture promises that the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame (6b). But to those who disobey the

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message, Jesus is the rock that makes them stumble and fall (8). To trust in Jesus means to accept him as the foundation of our life and the source of our security. It is to commit our life, our future, our family, all that we are and have to Jesus. It is to be “all in” with Jesus. Those who do this may seem to lose in the beginning. But in the end they are never put to shame. The Almighty Creator God is faithful, and he keeps his promise to those who trust in Jesus. On the other hand, those who ignore Jesus and disobey his message will stumble and fall. It may be hard to see the consequences at first. But in the course of time they will be clearly revealed. To trust Jesus at a young age and give up the freedom to enjoy the world seems to be foolish, but actually it is the only way to be sure that you don’t waste your life. So I encourage all young people to trust Jesus with everything. As you do, God promises that you will never be put to shame. Let’s be “all in” for Jesus!

II. You are chosen, royal, holy and special (9-10)

Although Peter warned of the consequence of disobedience by quoting Old Testament scripture, primarily he wanted to remind the believers of their identity. Let’s read verse 9a. **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession....”** Peter identified believers with four different names, which reflects Exodus 19:5-6. This identity was originally given to the people of Israel after God brought them out of bondage in Egypt. It was developed from God’s promise to Abraham, **“...you will be a blessing”** (Gen 12:2). God wanted to bless the people of Israel, and use them to bless peoples of all nations. But they became proud, ungrateful, self-righteous idol worshipers. They claimed the blessings of their identity but ignored God’s purpose in giving it to them. Due to their disobedience it seemed that God’s world salvation plan failed. But God never fails. By his grace, God chose those who believe in Jesus and made them his people to fulfill his salvation purpose. This identity should not make us proud, but humble. It was not earned but given by God’s grace. Let’s consider the four names, the identity that God has given to us.

- **“Chosen People”** To understand the meaning of “chosen people” let me tell you a story. There was a little boy who discovered that only he was adopted among all classmates at his school. He felt like an outsider. But his father explained, “When the other children in your class were born, there was no choice involved. But your mother and I chose you among thousands after serious consideration. You are very special to us.” Then the little boy’s

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sorrow turned to joy and he even had a sense of dignity among his classmates. When we are chosen by a prestigious college or company, we feel special. How special we are that the Creator God chose us to be his people. God chose us, not because of our merit, but because he loves us (Dt 7:7-9). The Lord gave me this word at a low point in my life, when I really doubted that I would be changed into godly man. When I came to him in the early morning, the Holy Spirit said, **“You are a chosen people....”** After that I began to see myself differently and to live with a confidence in God as his servant. The Lord gave me the courage and strength to persevere in serving him from my heart. The Lord wants all of us to have the assurance that we are his chosen people. Let’s accept what he says about us, be thankful for his grace, and live with a sense of dignity as God’s chosen people.

- **“A Royal Priesthood”** The early Christians must have been ill-treated, disparaged and marginalized because of their faith. To people’s eyes they were nobodies. But to God’s eyes they were his royal family. This is indeed great. For example, when baby George was born to Prince William and Kate, it was major news throughout the world. Just by virtue of his birth into the royal family he was honored and beloved, and became a celebrity. He will be admired and imitated in regards to fashion and lifestyle. How much more blessed and privileged we are to be God’s children. God made each of us a royal priest regardless of our human family line. As members of the royal family we share in the ministry of our Father God. Paul said that God **“has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors”** (2 Cor 5:19b-20a).

- **“A Holy Nation”** Though we are living in this world, we Christians do not belong to this world. We belong to God, who is holy. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. So we are called to reflect God’s holiness through our words, deeds, and lifestyle. As we do this together with other believers we form a holy nation. This nation is not geographical or territorial, but spiritual. To be a holy nation does not mean to live separately from others like Pharisees. But it means to reveal God’s holy presence in a corrupted world as we love and pursue God with all our hearts. Then God can transform the world through us.

- **“God’s Special Possession”** When we have a special possession, like an i-phone, a Tiffany’s bracelet or an expensive car, we treasure it and take care of it. God bought us with the precious blood of Jesus. So we are God’s special possession. He takes care of us, treasures us, protects us like the apple of his eye, and sometimes disciplines us for our good.

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Verse 9b tells us what we should do as God's people. It says, **"...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** To declare his praises does not mean preaching at people; rather, it means to share with others the abundant grace we have received from God. For example, a Gerasene man lived according to his sinful nature and was tormented by 6,000 demons. He cried out day and night and abused his body with self-torture. He became so wild and rebellious that he could not remain in society, but lived among the tombs. He escaped from society, but he could not escape from himself. He lost himself and took on the identity of demons. When Jesus saw him, he had mercy on him. Jesus asked his name, drove out the demons and restored his identity. The man was cured. He was so thankful that he wanted to go everywhere with Jesus. But Jesus told him, **"Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you"** (Mk 5:1-19). This is the meaning of declaring the praises of him. When people are living in darkness, they do not know who they are, where to go, why they live, or how to live. They need to hear about Jesus from people who have received his grace. Sharing our personal testimony is effective and contagious. In order to share what God has done for us, we should always remember that once we were not his people, but now we are the people of God. Once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy (10). Let's hold on to God's word, **"You are a chosen people,"** and declare his praises.