

Witness to the world: 1 Peter 2v9-12

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Date: 16 October 2016

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[0 : 00] 12. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul.

Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Thank you. Well, please keep your Bibles open and we're going to pray and ask for God's help. Let's do that now.

Father, you have given to us your word, the revelation of who you are, written down, recorded for us and in our own language today. So we thank you for your word, the Bible. And we thank you for your Holy Spirit. For the work he has done in our lives, opening our eyes, opening our hearts to see and understand, not just with our minds, but deeply with our hearts.

And so we ask, Father God, that you would speak to us through your word, by your spirit, helping us to become the people you have called us to be. And that we would live our lives in this world as you have called us to live. Father, may each one of us here today be deeply affected by this word, that it would shape us, that it would challenge us, that it would remind us of our amazing salvation and the hope that you have given to us. So Father, thank you for your word, for your spirit.

[3 : 04] And we ask for your continued help to us now, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I want to start by asking a couple of questions. No need to shout the answers out, but just think what the answers might be. Here's the first one. Did you come to church today?

Are you in church right now? Where will the church be when you go home?

In other words, what do you think church is? Well, for many, church is a building you go to, this structure that we're in right now.

To other, it's a meeting that you attend on a Sunday morning, such as where we are right now. But as far as the Bible is concerned, that's not church.

Have a look back at chapter 2, verse 4. This is what we saw last week. Chapter 2, verse 4. As you come to him, that is, as you come to Jesus, the living stone, that is, the foundation of our lives, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also are like living stones and are being built into a spiritual house.

[4 : 47] So, people who trust in Jesus, people who build their lives on the foundation of Jesus, are the church. As we come to Jesus in faith, we are being built together.

Each one of us is like a stone being built into a living house where God lives by his Spirit. So, church is not a place to go to.

It's not a meeting that we attend. Church is, if you see on the screen, church is God's chosen people, built together by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and called to declare and display Christ to the world.

That is amazing. That is who we are. God's chosen people, built together by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and called to declare and display Christ to the world.

Three things we are going to think about the church. First, our double identity as the church.

[6 : 07] Our double identity. First, our identity, number one, we belong to God. Look at verse 9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

Now, we didn't always belong to God. Once upon a time, we were not a people.

Look at verse 10. Once we were not a people. In the Old Testament, there's a prophet by the name of Hosea.

We read from it this morning. And God spoke a very clear message to the people through Hosea, using his family. And Hosea had a son.

And he called his son Lo-Ami. And Lo-Ami means, you're not my people, and I am not your God. [7:10] So you could imagine Hosea, Lo-Ami is out running away outside, and Hosea calls him. You're not my people. I'm not your God.

The message was clear to the people. Because of your rejection and your rebellion against God, because you've turned away from me and not loved me, you do not belong to me. You're not my people. And Peter, the author here, wants us to see our life like that. Because we too have ignored God. We are not God's people.

We do not belong to him. But, let's read verse 10 again. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.

Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Mercy is God not treating us as we deserve.

[8:19] In fact, God does the opposite towards us. In love he pursues unfaithful, rebellious people like you and me. And he makes us his people. Listen to those words again from Hosea.

What God said to Hosea, to the people. Having said you are not my people, and I am not your God. Here's the promise. Listen to these words again.

I will show my love to the one I called not my loved one. I will say to those called not my people, you are my people.

And they will say, you are my God. And that wonderful promise was fulfilled when Jesus came and loved us and showed mercy to us.

Jesus didn't treat us as we deserve. In fact, Jesus went to the cross to die for us so that people like you and me could become God's very own people.

[9:21] In fact, he goes on to tell us exactly who we are. Look at verse 9. We are God's chosen people. Or if you like, God's chosen race.

Verse 9. But you are a chosen people. God has taken nobodies like you and me and made us into his chosen race.

Loved from before time began. Gathered from all different kinds of backgrounds and nationalities. And created to be God's very own people.

So if you are a Christian here today, you are not European or African or Asian or American. First and foremost, our identity is we are God's chosen race.

But we're more than just that. Again, read verse 9. We are God's chosen people. A royal priesthood.

[10:23] Priests, you remember, were primarily responsible for making God known to the people. They spoke on behalf of God to the people. They were like a mediator from God to people.

And now he's telling us, guess what? We're a priesthood. From once rejecting God to now people who represent God in the world.

We're his royal priesthood. We have been chosen by the creator, the king of the universe, who rules over everyone and everything. And he has chosen us and he has sent us to represent God in the world.

His living representatives. So that means we're not students, first and foremost. We're not workers. We're not unemployed.

We're not sports players. We're not just mums at home looking after kids. We are a royal priesthood. God's representatives here on earth.

[11:32] A chosen people, a royal priesthood. And let's read verse 9 again. A holy nation. If you've done any kind of travelling, or surely if you've watched the shows on television, you know that every country you go to is different.

Different food. Different culture. Different languages. Each nation is distinct from everyone else. And look at what we are.

We are a holy nation. Holy means to be distinct. That is, we are different from everybody else. Not by the food we eat. Not by the clothes that we wear. But by our words of truth. By our loving behaviour. Together, corporately, as his people, we are to declare and display the beauty and the goodness of God in the world in which we live.

So you see, it's not just about me and my relationship with God and my personal experience with God. It's not about me and God all on our own.

[12:44] We're much bigger and greater than that. We are a holy nation. So I don't know how you came thinking of yourself today.

Maybe feeling a little bit down and miserable. Thinking that you're not worth very much. And people don't pay you much attention. Well, look again at your identity if you are trusting Christ.

You belong to God. You have been shown mercy. You are a chosen race. A royal priesthood. And a holy nation.

But that's not how the world will see God's people. So here's our second identity. And this should be familiar to us as we've gone through 1 Peter.

We are strangers in the world. Verse 11. Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world.

[13:47] In the eyes of God, we are royal. We are special. We are holy. We are treasured. But in the eyes of the world, we're nobodies.

Outsiders. Shut out. Pushed out. We're strangers. Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 1.

Remember how he set out this identity at the very beginning of the letter?

To God's elect. God's, yes, you're chosen people, loved by God, but you are strangers in the world.

If we belong to God, that means we do not belong to the world.

We cannot belong to two things at once. We either belong to God or we belong to the world. One writer put it like this. Christians, if you're living in the world as a Christian today, he says Christians are like immigrants, foreigners, temporary residents, like refugees.

[14:56] We do not belong. We do not have the rights of citizens. We're outsiders. We're living on the edge of the culture. Yes, we are a chosen race, but in the world we are an unwelcome race.

Yes, we're a royal priesthood, but in the world we're an unwanted priesthood. Yes, we are a holy nation, but in the world we're an undesirable nation.

Don't believe me? Well, if you are a Christian today, if you speak up for the rights of the unborn, if you stand and say, I am pro-life, and if you stand up for Christian values and for truth, you will feel a sense of isolation.

You will be pushed out. You will feel a stranger in the world. So you see, we do live with this double identity.

We belong to God, but we're strangers. The second thing about church is this, our double calling.

[16:15] And here's our first calling. We have been called out of the world. Let's read verse 9 again. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who did what?

Who called you out of darkness. Darkness is a description of life that is under the influence of the world.

It's a life without Jesus, where we are trapped and enslaved, without hope, without purpose. So the world will tell us things like this.

We've come from nowhere, and guess what? We're going nowhere. We are born, that's if we escape abortion.

We die naturally, if we escape euthanasia. It's a life that gives no hope beyond the grave, no purpose to our present existence.

[17:24] It's a life that is utterly dark and empty. But the good news is, Jesus, verse 9, has called us out from darkness into his wonderful light.

You see, as we come to Jesus, we discover we do have a purpose. We are loved and we are chosen before we were ever born. Through Jesus, we discover we do have a hope.

When we die, we've got an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. Jesus has called us out from the darkness of this world into his wonderful light.

Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 18. Chapter 1, verse 18. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life.

That's the darkness, the empty way of life. We've been redeemed from it. We have been redeemed, verse 19, with the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb, without blemish or defect.

[18:49] Christ, the perfect one, has rescued us from the empty darkness and has brought us into his beautiful light, bringing meaning and purpose and filling our lives with hope.

But that's just one side of our calling. We've been called out of the world but we have also been sent back into the world.

Look at verse 11. Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers, whereabouts are they?

In the world. Living life as a Christian in this world is tough. It is hard. To speak out for Christian truth, to stand up for Christian values, means we will not always be liked.

And in an effort to try and protect ourselves, what we do is we retreat into our nice, safe, Christian ghetto. We surround ourselves with people who believe the same things and think the same way.

[20 : 00] We hide behind the comfort of our own Christian faith, surrounding ourselves with Christian friends. We live in the world of Christian Facebook where we like Christian friends but unlike those who do not believe.

And we just live in our own little bubble. But that's wrong. That's wrong. The point is there is nothing private about our Christian faith.

Look at verse 12. Live such good lives among the pagans, around about with the people who do not yet believe.

Live your life amongst them. Work there. Live there. Play there. Jesus has rescued us from the world and now he sends us back into the world.

We are the light that goes into the darkness. You see, through Jesus we have been changed and transformed and we are to bring that hope with us back to the world.

[21 : 17] Have a look with me, please. Keep your finger in 1 Peter and just go back to Matthew's Gospel. Gospel. Matthew chapter 5. It's on page 968.

968. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples? Matthew chapter 5.

Sorry, it's 969. We're going to read from verse 14. Matthew 5 verse 14.

What does he say of the church, his people? You are the light of the world. We're like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Our light is shining for all to see. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. That's kind of to retreat into our own safe Christian ghetto.

[22 : 23] Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In other words, we are to live our lives out in the world. In the same way, verse 16, let your light shine before men and women that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

we have been rescued from the world of darkness. Now we are sent back into the world as his lights to shatter the darkness, to bring hope and to bring life.

So, our double identity, we belong to God, but yet we're strangers in this world. Our double calling, we've been rescued out of the world and now we have been sent back into the world.

And third, our double mission. First, we are to declare Jesus through our words to the world.

Declare Jesus through our words to the world. Look at verse 9. You're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

[23 : 51] You've got a purpose, you've got a mission, you have been chosen by God to do what? Look at the end of verse 9. That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

The story of our new identity and our new calling is an amazing story to tell. We are, verse 9, to declare the praises of him.

We are to point to Jesus. We are to point to God and tell and show people the incredible and amazing life-changing work that God has done in our lives and can be done in your life.

To tell the story of how God has loved us and chosen us and made us his royal priesthood. How he's taken nobodies like you and me, rebels living in the emptiness of this dark world and made us his holy nation.

How he has given us a living hope and inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. We are here to tell the story of how God rescues us from darkness and brings us into his wonderful light.

[25 : 17] I've heard a phrase, maybe you've heard this too. People often quote it. Always preach the gospel and if necessary use words.

Always preach the gospel and if necessary use words. Well, whoever said it, is wrong because the good news about Jesus is a word.

We need to use our words. We are to declare the truth about God because it is his word, the word of God that changes lives. Look back at chapter 1 verse 23.

Chapter 1 verse 23. He tells us that we have been born again. This is this new life, this new hope, this new beginning. We have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable.

How? Through the living and enduring word of God. You see, when the word of God, the good news about Jesus, is told and declared, God by his spirit changes lives and transforms lives.

[26 : 29] Ephesians number 16. Now, I know that's hard because I find it hard. It's hard to talk about Jesus when people don't want to listen.

That's why on Wednesdays, as our study together, we're looking at how to talk about Jesus even when it's tough. Because it is tough.

and together we're sharing with each other, we're learning together, we're encouraging each other to talk about Jesus. And it's been exciting to hear the stories of people as they've come on a Wednesday and tell us how they've gotten on in work, how they got on with this friend and how people are declaring the story of Jesus.

So, declare Jesus through our words. And display Jesus through our lives to the world. That's the second part of our mission.

Look at verse 12, chapter 2, verse 12. Live such good lives among those who are not yet believers that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

[27 : 53] Words are necessary, but our lives must match what we talk about. Let me put it this way. People need to see the gospel as well as hear the gospel.

We say, God is love. Well then let's love the refugee who is isolated and alone. You say, Jesus forgives?

Well then don't hold any grudges and forgive your brother and sister. Again. You say, God gave his life? Then give your life sacrificially for the service of others.

You say, Jesus accepts us? Then welcome others and don't condemn them. If we're wanting people to hear the good news of Jesus, then our very lives must reflect and display the beauty of Jesus to those around us.

People are much more likely going to listen and they're going to ask questions if our life looks like the message that we're seeking to tell. That's why, verse 11, he says, I urge you, dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul.

[29 : 17] Sinful natures. It makes us selfish. It puts barriers between us and people. And if it's not dealt with, it will turn people away from Jesus.

Our behaviour in public, our ways in private, have an effect on people. Rather than display the beauty of Jesus, we'll just display the ugliness of our hearts.

That is why there is a battle going on. A war in our souls to fight against our sinful nature so that we display the beauty of Jesus to the world.

In the first century, just after this letter was written, it was really tough to be a Christian.

It was illegal to be a Christian. Ordinary believers, just like you and me, put yourself back into the first century, didn't have a Bible, didn't have one of these that you have in your lap.

[30 : 24] Most people couldn't read. There were a few letters that Paul had and bits of scripture that others had that were passed around. They didn't have church buildings to go to, not even a grand sports hall like this.

No worship groups. No projectors. No Christianity Explored courses. No tracts or booklets to give to people.

They just had people like you and me meeting together, gathering together, living their lives together.

And amazingly, the church grew and people became followers of Jesus. How did that happen with such few resources?

People, the Word of God and the Spirit of God working together? How did it all happen? Well, they got their new identity, that they were God's loved and chosen people.

[31 : 33] They understood their new calling, that they were sent into the world as God's royal priesthood. They were a holy nation. God's representatives. And they understood their new mission as they went about.

They talked about Jesus and their lives reflected Jesus as they loved people and cared for people. It seems so simple, doesn't it?

And the reality is, we can all do that too. And what encourages me, and I guess it encourages you too, is that many people here are doing this already together.

to hear your stories of how you go about your day-to-day lives when you go into college, when you're going into work, to hear of mums who are telling the story of Christ to their children, of

making the effort to put yourself into a tough place where you talk about Jesus. And as you go about your lives loving your neighbours, loving your friends, even when they don't even recognise it, even when they slag you off, even when things go wrong, you're doing it. [32 : 57] And so our encouragement together is, rather than run away and hide into our safe Christian ghetto and into that nice little cosy bubble where we surround our friends with our nice worship songs and our nice readings and our nice Christian friends, we just go out into the darkness.

We are the light of God, shattering the darkness, bringing the hope, bringing the life. And when we live like this, look at the end of verse 12, they will see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

You know what? You mightn't see huge changes now, but there's a promise and take it away with you that on the day Christ returns because of your mission, because of your declaring of Christ, because of your displaying of Christ, there will be people that you would have impacted and they will be glorifying Christ with you and they will share in that eternal inheritance forever and forever. We're not ordinary people. We're a royal priesthood filled with the power of God's Holy Spirit sent to declare and display Christ to the world.

May God give us grace to be his chosen people. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, would you please help us to, as it were, block out the voices of the world that tell us that we're nobodies, that we have nothing, that we are nothing.

[35 : 11] Help us to listen to the clear, crystal voice of God to be reminded again of our identity, that we are God's chosen people, his holy nation, rescued from the emptiness and darkness, called into his beautiful light, given hope, given meaning, given purpose.

Help us. Fill us with your Spirit that we, this week, may declare your truth. And that we would so fight the sin in our lives that we would display the beauty of Christ from our lives.

And we pray this, that people, our friends, our family, our loved ones, will glorify Christ, will love him and worship him the day Christ returns.

Father, do your work, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing together.

Father, you're the word of God the Father, which tells the story of God's amazing love who reached down into our world.

[36 : 46] He didn't stay away from the world. He came into the world, into the darkness, to be light. Nope