

# Being God's People

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we're going to read from God's Word from the book of 1 Chronicles. And we're going to start at chapter 1, verse 1, and we're going to read a selection of sections through into chapter 9, not the whole of it.

I have nothing in front of me. I'm flying blind here. He dies in the back of my head. You have a picture of Father Ted and Father Dougal up there. But we are going to read it.

Now, before we read God's Word and come to listen to it, let's pray and ask for the Lord's help as we turn to his Word. Let's pray for a moment. Merciful God, we thank you that you have given us the Bible that makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

May the instruction of your Word bring us pleasure and delight. May we always, as we've just been singing, glorify you all our days in every thought and word and deed.

And to that end, we pray that only your Word might control us. We pray that as we come to your Word now, that you would open our eyes, that we might see wonderful things in your law.

[ 1 : 37 ] For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen. Now, 1 Chronicles 1, verse 1. And then down to verse 28.

Abraham fathered Isaac, Esau and Israel.

Then chapter 2, verse 1. These are the sons of Israel. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

And then over to chapter 3, verse 16. Yep, 16 and 17.

The descendants of Jehoiakim, Jechaniah or Jehoiachin, his son and Zedekiah, his son and the sons of Jehoiachin.

[ 3 : 06 ] The captive Shealtiel, Malachi Ram, Petahiah, Shennah's Zahar, Jechemiah, Hoshamah and Nebah Beath.

And then on to chapter 6, verses 48. Their brothers, the Levites, were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God.

But Aaron and his sons made offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense for all the work of the most holy place. And to make atonement for Israel according to all that Moses, the servant of God, had commanded.

And these are the sons of Aaron. Eleazar, his son. Phinehas, his son. Abishua, his son. Buki, his son. Uzi, his son. Zerachiah, his son.

Merah-ioth, his son. Amariah, his son. Abith-tub, his son. Zadok, his son. And Ahimehaz, his son.

[ 4 : 19 ] And then finally over to chapter 9 and verses 1 to 4. So all Israel was recorded in the genealogies and these were written in the book of the kings of Israel.

And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith. Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants.

And some of the men of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in Jerusalem. Uziah, the son of Ammihud, the son of Omri, the son of Imri, the son of Bani, from the sons of Perez, the sons of Judah.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Now I can even see with your masks on, you're thinking to yourself, the brains are working. What on earth are you going to say about that? Well, let me say what I want to say by asking you this question.

What do you do? I'll not tell you what I do because you can probably work out what I do. But what do you do when you see a wet paint do not touch sign?

[ 5 : 30 ] What do you do as you're walking in the park and you come across a sign, keep off the grass? Yes, you do the same as I do.

You want to walk on the grass. You want to touch the paint. One commentator has described 1 Chronicles chapter 1 to 9. And this is what he called it. A desert with the only oasis being the prayer of Jabez in chapter 4, verses 9 to 10.

And he adds this, I'm devoid of preaching material. So a statement like that does for me what wet paint don't touch and keep off the grass does for you.

I want to preach a sermon on it. And this is it. But the question is this. Why has God left us in his word these nine chapters of jaw crunching, tongue twisting, and for mildly dyslexic people like me, almost unpronounceable names?

Now the writer of 1 Chronicles, whom we call the Chronicler, because we don't know his name. Some suspect he was Ezra, but we'll just call him the Chronicler. He deliberately gave us this list of long names, most of whom were dead many years before he had lived.

[ 6 : 54 ] He did so not simply to remind us, because it's always good to be reminded of this, that although we believe in the inspiration of the whole of the Bible, not every bit of the Bible is inspiring.

Nor is it to test your resolve to read a chapter of the Bible every day. I don't know when you do that where your resolve kind of runs into the sand.

Most people hit it at the end of Exodus and Leviticus as well. My personal running of the sand place is Job. But I had a man in my last congregation, and his was 1 Chronicles 1 to 9.

He said he really had to sort of grit his teeth and go for it when he came to that in his resolve to read the Bible. But that's not why it's there in the Bible. It's there to teach us what it means for us as Christians to be the people of God.

Because you see, this wasn't just any old list of names that you might pick up in a public records office. This was a list of the names of people who had made up God's people down through the generations.

[ 8 : 23 ] And these names, these jaw-crunching, tongue-twisting, and almost unpronounceable names, are going to tell us what it means to be the people of God in 2022 in Glasgow.

So, what do these list of names teach us about who we are as a people of God? Well, in the first place, the chronicler is reminding us that as God's people, we are a loved people.

We are a loved people. And we come across that in chapter 1 through to chapter 2, verse 2. When I was an assistant minister many years ago, I wasn't married at the time.

And I used to get invited round to some of the elders and some of the, we didn't call them deacons, but there would be deacons here. They're homes for Sunday lunch or for tea.

And I discovered that I caused great consternation among the ladies of the congregation because of the way that I ate my meals. Now, this might sound strange coming from an Irish person, but I'm not really a big fan of potatoes.

[ 9 : 49 ] I like chips, but I'm not a big fan of, yeah, I eat them. I like vegetables more than I like potatoes.

But I like meat most of all. So I used to eat my potatoes first, and then my vegetables, and then my meat.

And people used to panic that I didn't like the chicken or the fish or the meat that was done. Now, the chronicler does something similar here in chapter 1 into chapter 2.

He doesn't list the names in random fashion. He has a pattern for giving us these names. And what he does is he introduces us to the individual and then his sons.

And then he deals with the line that God hasn't chosen, and he kind of gets it out of the way like I got my potatoes out of the way before I got out of the vegetables and the meat.

[ 10 : 54 ] And then he finally deals with the line of people whom God loved and God had chosen. And you can see that, for example, if you look at verses 4 to 27 about Noah's family tree.

The chronicler introduces us in verse 4 to Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now, the most important branch of Noah's family was Shem's line because Abraham was part of this line.

And this was the line that God had chosen to set his love upon in order that he might fulfill his purposes of salvation in the world.

So before he focuses on the chosen line, which he does in verses 17 to 27, he gets the non-chosen line of Japheth and Ham out of the way in verses 5 to 16.

And the same pattern emerges when the chronicler deals with Abraham's line in verses 28 to 37 of chapter 1.

[ 11 : 59 ] He introduces us to Abraham and then his sons, Isaac and Ishmael. And then he deals with the non-chosen line of Ishmael in verses 29 to 33, and he gets it out of the way, and then he gives his attention to Isaac, the chosen line upon which God had set his love, verse 34.

And then when it comes to Isaac's line, again, it will come as no surprise to us that the chronicler does exactly the same thing. Esau and Jacob were Isaac's sons, were introduced to them in verse 34.

And then the non-chosen line of Esau is eliminated, verses 35 to 54. And finally, the spotlight falls on Jacob, the chosen line on whom God has set his love, verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2.

So that's the pattern. And by using this pattern, the chronicler is reminding us that it is no accident that God's people exist.

Instead, it's a result of God's activity as he carefully calls into existence and shapes a people who are special to him and upon which he can shower his love and mercy and kindness.

[ 13 : 22 ] That God's people are a loved people chosen by God to be on the receiving end of his affection and all the blessings that he wants to pour into their lives.

And folks, we are not here tonight by accident. We are a loved people. We are here because God has set his love upon us before time began.

And he has chosen that he will pour his love into our lives. And we say to God, well, why do you do that on me?

And God says, because I wanted to, because I loved you. And I want to do that. So just enjoy it.

And look at some of the names that appear in the list that God has chosen to love.

There's Noah. Now, apart for being famous for his ark building, Noah is also infamous for being the Bible's first drunk.

[ 14 : 37 ] But there he is, loved by God. And what about Abraham? You know, we tend to think of Abraham, you know, as sort of like a grande-like figure, don't we?

Because we do come across him the first time in the Bible. He's 75. He's got his free television license, you know, and that sort of thing. And he's nice and cuddly. But the Bible tells us that Abraham was a card-carrying, pagan, idol worshiper when God decided to love him.

But he loved him and saved him and chose to bless him. And what about Jacob? Jacob is a chancer and a double dealer of the highest order.

He makes Del Boy Trotter look like the paragon of straight dealing and honesty. You would not buy a second-hand car off Jacob. Just wouldn't have.

He's a twister. That's what his name means. But God chose him and set his love upon him. And what about Jacob's sons?

[ 15 : 52 ] Well, on a scale of 1 to 10, most of them scored minus points in likability. And yet, God loved all these people because their names appear on the chosen side of this list.

And it reminds us that God treats his people not on the basis of our performance, not on the basis of what we deserve, but on the basis of his love and his grace and his mercy and his kindness and his compassion and his goodness.

And if we want to see the greatest reminder of that, it's not on this list of names. It's found in 1 Chronicles 1 to 9.

But it's found in Jesus' death on the cross. It's in the cross that we see God's love for his people in its sharpest focus. And this means if by God's grace and through faith in Jesus alone, we are part of his people, then God loves us.

And nothing that we do or do not do will alter that fact. We are God's people, a loved people, loved with an eternal, unchangeable love by a gracious, compassionate and merciful God.

[ 17 : 37 ] And please remember that because we so easily forget it. God's people are a loved people. The second thing the chronicler is reminding us about who we are as God's people is this.

As God's people, we are an expectant people. We come across this from chapter 2, verse 3, right through to the chapter 4, verse 23.

Because for almost three chapters, the chronicler focuses on Judah. Even though he wasn't Jacob's eldest son.

I think he was fourth in line. But the reason why so many column inches are devoted to Judah is because Judah was the leader. And more importantly, for the chronicler, Judah was, it was from Judah's line that David came.

The greatest of Israel's kings and the one to whom God made the strategic promise that one of his descendants would rule over God's people forever.

[ 18 : 45 ] 2 Samuel 7, 16. Now, park that in the back of your mind. And let's concentrate on verses 17 to 24 of chapter 3.

Because in these verses, we come across something very strange. We come across the royal line after the exile.

Not before the exile, but after the exile. God's promise, you remember, was that to David was that one of his descendants would rule over God's people forever. And with the exile, it appeared that that promise had run into the sand.

When Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were taken prisoner and then deported off into exile in Babylon along with all the people.

It looked as if God's promise that a Davidic king would rule over his people had completely bombed. And by roughly 400 BC, around the time when the chronicler wrote, although the Jews had returned from exile back to their own land, none of Jehoiachin's descendants who are listed in these verses was reigning as king in Jerusalem.

[ 20 : 06 ] And there was actually no chance that any of them would. Because Judah, as the land was known then, was part of the Persian Empire. And although it seemed that God's promises had bombed, the chronicler didn't think so.

He believed that God would still keep his promise and a descendant of David par excellence would still appear to rule over God's people.

And that's why he continued to trace David's line after the exile. He was living in the expectation of a coming king.

And we know, because we have access to more of the story than the chronicler had, that this expectant hope was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.

The chronicler's insistence on continuing to trace David's line even after the exile shows that God's people were to be an expectant people, waiting for God to keep his word.

[ 21 : 24 ] Irrespective of how long it took God to keep his word. And like God's people in the chronicler's time, we too today are to be an expectant people.

We don't look forward to Jesus' first coming, because that's already taken place. But we look forward to Jesus' second coming, when he will return to earth a second time, not quietly and humbly, but publicly, visibly, and with great power and glory.

And this expectation of Jesus' glorious return is not just wishful thinking on our part. It's fueled by Jesus' promise.

I will come back and take you to be with me. And the fact that we are expecting people will be seen in the Lord's Supper that we celebrate tomorrow, because what do we do?

We celebrate it in the hope of Jesus' return, proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes. And looking forward to that time when the Lord's Supper itself will be replaced by the great married supper of the Lamb in heaven.

[ 22 : 45 ] And isn't it this hope, folks, this hope is the thing that keeps us going today, during all the ups and downs of our lives.

We know as Christians, because Jesus has told us, and the apostles have indicated to us, we know that bad things will be done to us, and unkind and hurting things will be said about us and to us, simply because we are Christians.

But we also know that when Jesus returns, all wrongs will be righted, and we will be seen who we really are.

Not a marginalized minority, who are a legitimate target for all kinds of abuse, but we will be seen as who we are, as God's children.

And we know that we will be assaulted by Satan's temptations, to which we give in so easily. We know that we will be seduced by our culture's self-centered values and attitudes.

[ 23 : 56 ] We know that we will be drawn away from Jesus by the weakness of our own hearts. The world, the flesh, the devil will get us. They'll short-circuit our effectiveness in God's service.

They'll stymie the way we live for Jesus. They'll cause us to dumb down our worship. But we also know, we also know, that when Jesus returns and we go to be with him in heaven, all these factors that have given us so much grief now as Christians will be removed permanently.

God's people are an expectant people. We're living daily in the hope of Jesus keeping his promise and returning to earth a second time and to reward his people and to judge the living and the dead. And it's this hope, it's this hope that keeps us going. So the chronicler's list of names are reminding us as God's people that we are a loved people, that we are an expectant people.

And then in the third place, it's telling us that as God's people, we are a worshipping people. We've come to chapter 6 here. And this chapter 6 is all about the Levites, all about the tribe of Levi.

[ 25 : 23 ] And we know that the Levites were responsible. That was the tribe responsible for the worship of God. Now, structurally, chapter 6 lies at the heart of this section of 1 Chronicles.

And by putting it there, the chronicler is reminding us that worship should be at the center of the life of God's people, reminding us that before God's people are anything else, we are to be a worshipping people.

But notice that the chronicler is concerned about a specific kind of worship. In verses 48 and 49, he makes a distinction between the Levites in general and Aaron and his descendants who were priests in particular.

And he focuses in on the priest's activity of making sacrifices that atone for sin. So right at the heart of Israel's worship, there was to be an altar where a substitute by its death would secure the forgiveness of the people's sins.

Now, these people were already redeemed. The nation as such had experienced the redemption of the Exodus. And this generation that the chronicler was writing to had experienced, if you like, a second Exodus, the redemption of the return from exile.

[ 26 : 57 ] But these people still were sinners. They still wandered from God. Even though they were God's people, there was sometimes distance between God and themselves.

But God and his grace had provided in the Old Testament sacrificial system a means by which their sins could be forgiven. And Israel brought back close to God once again.

And it was through and only through the death of a substitute. And from our perspective, we know what this was all talking about and leading to.

It's talking about Jesus' death on the cross and how in his death he fulfilled everything that the Old Testament sacrificial symbolized. His death was the perfect substitutionary sacrifice by means of which our sin was dealt effectively.

But even as Christians, we wander away from God. We distance ourselves from him.

[ 28 : 06 ] Our sins lead to a coldness in our relationship with him. So how important it is for us then to be that worshipping people who keep the cross at the center of things.

Because it's only the God-provided substitutionary death of Jesus that deals with our sin and restores the relationship between us and God once again.

And folks, the cross is not something that was just hugely relevant for us at the start of our Christian lives. When we suddenly had our eyes opened as we were singing about in the last hymn, suddenly the Spirit opened our eyes and we saw that we were sinners and we couldn't save ourselves.

And we cried out to God to save us. And on the basis of Jesus' death, he saved us. The cross was not only important, it was very important then, but it's still important and probably more so because one of the signs of maturity in the Christian life is how we become more and more aware of how sinful we are and how selfish and self-centered we are.

And we need the cross every day, every moment of our Christian lives. We need to be a worshipping people. Sunday to Sunday, 24-7, each moment of each day, the cross should be impacting our lives and providing that solution to our continuing sinfulness.

[ 29 : 56 ] We're an expectant people, one day we won't sin, but we're not in heaven yet. So we're to be a worshipping people who constantly glory in the substitutionary death of Jesus, our crucified Savior.

And then the final matter of the chronicler's list of names is trying to show us is that we are, as God's people, a preserved people.

This is chapter 9. We're not only loved and we're not only loved and I've forgotten what I've said, expectant and worshipping, but we're preserved.

Now, although a great deal of the names in these chapters are people who lived long before the chronicler himself, in chapter 9, verses 1 to 34, we arrive at the chronicler's own time and the people he lists in this chapter are his contemporaries, people with whom he worshipped, socialized, worked and traded.

Now, why does he take 34 verses to mention all these people? did they get wind that he was writing a book and so they asked their mate if he would give them a mention, a name check in the book? [ 31 : 34 ] And because he was such a popular guy, he had to take 34 verses to write down all his pals' names? Well, I don't think so, neither do you. There's something else going on here in chapter 9 and I know I'm showing my age in saying this but some of you will know it as well because you're in the same bracket as me.

This is a Victor Meldrew moment of one foot in the grave. If you're young enough to not know what one foot in the grave is, that's fine, but some of us know what one foot in the grave and Victor Meldrew was always going around saying, I can't, I don't believe it.

I don't believe it. And this chapter, chapter 9 of 1 Chronicles is a Victor Meldrew moment. The chronicler is saying, I don't believe it.

I really don't. Everything seems stacked against God's people but here they are back in Jerusalem worshipping God worshipping God in a rebuilt temple.

And the chronicler is saying, it's unbelievable. I just don't believe it. that's what he's muttering to himself as he writes down all these names in the 34 verses of chapter 9.

[ 33 : 06 ] He says, who would have thought even a few years ago that God's people would be in Jerusalem? Jerusalem. It's hard to take in that all these people are actually living in Jerusalem.

As he would say in Northern Ireland and if you're from Northern Ireland you'll understand this expression. He said, you couldn't beat it with a big stick. Yes, things were tough for them.

They were still under Persian jurisdiction. There were more Jews back in Babylon than there were in Judea. Their neighbours all around them hated their guts and wanted to eliminate them.

They were living in the armpit of the Persian Empire but there they were back in Jerusalem worshipping God in a rebuilt temple.

And what the chronicler is saying here actually bucks the trend of history. Never before had a nation been crushed in battle deported from their land into exile hundreds of miles away and then returned to that land a couple of generations later as a cohesive unit.

[ 34 : 19 ] It hadn't happened before but it was happening now. It's unbelievable. I don't believe it. this sort of thing shouldn't happen but it did.

And it didn't happen because the Jews were clever politicians and so they struck a good deal with the shakers and movers in the Persian political elite. It happened because God had preserved his people in the years of exile.

And it's a wonderful truth this folks that we are a preserved people. God is with us all the time watching over us protecting us and keeping us.

God has committed himself to us. He said I will be your God and you'll be my people. He's committed himself to us.

He's invested hugely in us. And the supreme demonstration of God's commitment and the huge investment in his people is Jesus' death.

[ 35 : 30 ] In the light of all the times we mess up do we sometimes fear that God might get fed up with us?

Do we ever get afraid that God might say oh no here she comes again? Do we ever get worried that God might get bored with us and switch his attention to some more exciting Christian who causes him less bother than we do?

Folks the fact that God has invested so much if you like of himself in preserving us and that he's so committed to saving us by means of Jesus' death and keeping us safe so that we will arrive in heaven that should kick our fears and worries into the long grass.

Life might be challenging our circumstances might be hard our spiritual temperature goes up and down and is more often down than up but we are a preserved people in whom God has invested so much he's committed himself so much to us that he will not dump us and move on to somebody else that should be a great comfort to us.

So maybe tonight you feel that you've been visiting a mortuary with the mention of all these dead guys who's with jaw crunching tongue twisting and almost unpronounceable names which I didn't really pronounce correctly but they're here to tell you that if by God's grace and through faith in Jesus alone you are a Christian a member of God's people you have a God who loves you even to the extent of knowing your name you have a God who fills you with an expectant hope of a glorious future for us as Christians the best has yet to come the best is in the future this is what

[ 38 : 21 ] God gives us we're an expectant people if you're a Christian you have a God who keeps you safe all the way through life and into eternal life who refuses to dump you or to toss you to one side no matter what you do because he is so committed to you and has invested so much of himself in you and not only do you have the chronicles list of names to remind you of who we are as the people of God and that all that God has done for us in salvation but when we worship tomorrow and especially as we share together fellowship with Jesus at his table we will be reminded again that we are a loved people expectant people preserved people and we will worship him and we will worship the lamb who died in our place and we will commit ourselves gladly to following such a saviour all the days of our life and pray as we just sang that all our days would be glory to his name let's pray for a moment oh God what gracious love you lavish on us what glorious hope you fill us with what forgiving mercy you show towards us and what preserving power you display in our lives we bless you that in Jesus your son we have a saviour who loves us brings hope to us forgives us and keeps us so in his name we sing your praise and bless you father son and holy spirit our rock and our redeemer amen women may go sue para