

The People of God

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn back to the New Testament and to 1st Peter in chapter 2.

We were looking at part of this earlier on today, and we want to return to it and consider 1st Peter 2 verse 10.

And you'll find that on page 1076. We may just read at verse 9, we were thinking about this in the morning.

But you are a chosen generation or a chosen race, a royal residence priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

I want to consider with you this expression, the people of God.

[1 : 25] And to think about it not as people may just conjure up from a religious perspective, but what the expression means on the basis of the Bible's teaching, of the whole of the Bible's teaching on the subject.

The expression itself, the people of God's teaching on the subject.

That their prophet is the prophet, and so on. And therefore they are, in that sense, they claim to be the people of God.

And so too, to the Jewish people, and although they have a bit more going for them, in so far as they can go back in the history, in the basis of the Hebrew Bible, they can go back a long, long way, thousands and thousands of years, in the strict sense, whilst they have not embraced the truth of God as it is fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, they can't be really considered, strictly speaking, the people of God.

I want us to look at this then, in terms of the biblical teaching, and to notice that in the true biblical sense, we are only constituted the people of God as we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and as we follow him.

[3 : 24] That's what Peter is saying here, in fact. And we've been tracing through the whole line of Peter's thinking on this. Last week, we looked at how, as living stones, as spiritually alive unto God, through faith in Jesus, we are being built up a spiritual house, built upon the chief cornerstone, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the chief cornerstone of that spiritual temple. And Peter has been emphasising that people who are in this position are acceptable to God, and their worship and service are acceptable to God, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he goes on to show that they are indeed the people of God. They were once not a people, but now are the people of God.

And Peter has been at pains, as it were, to show that this came to pass, and comes to pass in time, because of the purpose of God, the eternal purpose, the electing purpose of God.

People are brought, under the power of the gospel, into that living temple, as we've been thinking, and into that company known as the people of God.

[5 : 01] The family of God. And surely it's important to us to think about this as it bears on ourselves. Am I one of those who are the people of God?

Do I belong to that grouping known as the people of God? Do I care for the people of God? Do I bear any likeness to the people of God?

Do I resemble in some way the great elder brother, the Lord Jesus, who is the main person, so to speak, in the family?

How do I relate to the world? Am I part of the witnessing people of God? We were looking at that earlier on.

Verse 9. His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him, who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

[6 : 07] So there are all sorts of strands here that entwine around what we mean by the people of God. But this evening I want us to simply consider, first of all, what the people were by nature, and what they became in the mercy of God.

And I hope that this will be encouraging to us, and that the expression, the people of God, will be precious to us on that account.

First of all then, what they were by nature, and we are told simply, who once were not a people.

Once they were not a people.

Once they couldn't take that expression and apply it to themselves and say, I belong to the people of God. Because once upon a time they were not the people of God.

We bear in mind that the very expression, who once were not a people, simply tells us that it's not something that we've always been.

[7 : 26] It's something we've become. By nature, we're not born the people of God. Paul, in writing, and we were thinking about Ephesians 2, earlier today in connection with the spiritual temple, that is God is building for himself.

But at the very beginning of Ephesians 2, Paul reminded the Ephesians that they were dead in trespasses and sins. They were totally switched off to God.

They didn't know him. In their natural state, they were separated from him. And so, that is something that is true of us all.

Paul says there in Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3, that we were just like all the rest. The God of this world ruled us.

We didn't necessarily know he was ruling us, but we were going with the flow. We were by nature blind to our need of Christ and of salvation.

[8 : 37] And there are people here tonight who were brought up from their earliest days on the gospel. And you know that often you heard and heard, but it never registered.

We say the penny never dropped. We didn't click on, to use a more modern turn of phrase.

We simply knew it in our heads, but not in our hearts. Because by nature we were spiritually blind to our real need of Christ.

And to know that he died in our room and stead on the cross. That it was about God laying upon his son our iniquity, in order that we might benefit in a wonderful and everlasting way.

We were in darkness to that. Not knowing the power of it in our minds and hearts. And so we were largely ignorant of a personal relationship with the Lord.

[9 : 48] And Paul in Ephesians says that we were brought out of that. You who were dead in trespasses and sins, he has made alive through Christ.

He switched us on. He shone in our hearts to move to a very familiar and lovely passage, 2 Corinthians 4, verse 6. The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shone in our hearts.

He caused that light to begin to be in the very depths of our being. So that we became alive to God.

And all the things that we were privileged, those of us who were in that position, privileged to learn as children, suddenly we saw that the lights were turned on in our hearts, as it were.

And suddenly these things really meant something to us. And we saw in Jesus our salvation. We were not, by nature, the people of God.

[11 : 00] We were separated from him. And interestingly, in that Ephesians 2, Paul is saying towards the end of it, that that's the way the Gentiles were.

All the Gentile world, virtually anyway, was in darkness, in a state of darkness and ignorance, without God and without hope in the world.

And he argues that we were brought near in Christ. And you see, the fact of the matter, and we were considering this earlier today, that was true of the bulk of the Israelites.

For all that they were under the blessings, and the teaching, and the ministry, both of the prophets and the priests, and the bulk of them were stubborn in their hearts, and rebellious, they didn't receive the good news in the promises, concerning the Messiah to come.

And that's why God let them go their own way. We were singing in Psalm 81, to remind ourselves of that. God would have fed them, but they wouldn't listen to him.

[12 : 23] If they would but listen, then they would be blessed, but my people would have none of me. He's thinking there about, about the way that he had brought them in, to the way of blessing.

And they could even be called, in a sense, my people, but they would have none of them.

Therefore, he says, I gave them over, to their own stubborn hearts, to wander in their own ways, effectively to die, in their sins.

And, there's that very illuminating passage, in Hebrews 4, which helps us understand that so clearly. In Hebrews 4, at the beginning, the gospel was preached, to them, as well as to us.

It's not that they didn't have the gospel, in the promises. It's not that they didn't have the gospel, in the Old Testament era. They had it in the shadows and types.

Christ was set forth, in the promises. Christ was set forth, in the tabernacle, and the temple, and the priesthood, and the prophets, and the kings.

[13 : 44] They were all shadows, or foreshadowings, of the reality. And if you look at that passage, in Hebrews 4, it tells us, the gospel was preached, to them as well as to us, but the word, did not profit them, because it didn't meet, with a believing response.

It didn't meet, with a believing response. And, in Hosea's day, God said, enough, call them, lower me.

In fact, he was told, he was told, to call his son, his second son, lower me, not my people. That's the Hebrew, lower me, is the Hebrew for, not my people.

And his daughter, was called, lower me, lower me, no mercy, or not mercy. And it's, it's interesting, you see that, that, what is lying behind, what Peter is saying, here in verse 10, is very much, from Hosea.

That's why, we read the passage. In Hosea 1. It helps us, to understand, the serious, nature of the problem, of their, willful disobedience, and the refusal, of the light, they were given.

[15 : 19] God said, enough. And, that passage, serves, as a warning, to us, so that, we make the best, use of the ministry, of the gospel, and, and not hang loose, on it, or even despise it, as they did.

You see, the measure, of light, we have, God has given it, to us. And, we can't, go back from it. It's there, it will always, be with us.

And, it's better, by far, to make use of it, a proper use of it. It's better, to use it, to, feather mouths, with arguments, that God, might be merciful, to us, and make us, part of that, group, my people.

In history, God, turned, the fortunes, of his people.

We were thinking, not many weeks ago, about Pentecost, you remember. And, at Pentecost, that first Pentecost, after Jesus ascended, upon high, thousands, of Jewish, people, came into the faith.

[16 : 41] They became, true Israelites. They became, the true Zion, of God, the true Israel, of God, through faith, in Jesus. You find it, in Acts 2, 41.

They became, a me, my people. The lower me, was gone. Not, my people. That's only, part of the story.

The main, part of the story, is this. That God, God, purposed, that the, Gentile nations, would come in.

That they would, obtain mercy. That they would, become, God's, people. And, if you look, in the book of Acts, and Paul's ministry, in particular, that's what it was, all about.

God, raised him up, caused him, to suffer many things, he shall suffer many things, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake. But, he had a, a wonderful ministry.

[17 : 51] We don't think about it, as much, as we should, perhaps, but we have, we have a lady, from Spain, in our midst, and Paul went to Spain. Paul reached Spain, with the gospel, through Italy, and Spain.

The Gentiles, heard and believed, to report. And, it was part, and partial, of God's purpose. The book of Acts, is full of the demonstration, of, God, bringing people, who were, not his people, into his kingdom.

Who had not, been shown mercy, into that, wonderful state, where they were, shown mercy. He made, a remnant return, of the Jewish people.

That's true, and we see it, we see it brought, very clearly, to the fore, when, those thousands, come in, through Peter's sermon. But, we see it, in the gathering, of the Gentiles, not only, in the apostolic era, but down, through the ages, ever since.

making, the Gentiles, with believing Jews, the people, of God, who were, once, not, my people, says God.

[19 : 20] And, therefore, let us not, be, ignorant, of the response, God requires, of us, to obey, the gospel, to receive, its terms, and its promises, by faith.

Think about it, we have it all the time, in, in, in ordinary life. You want, an insurance policy, you get, somebody who can talk to you, about it, you read the terms, if you're wise, you read the terms, even the small print, you, want, to open, a new account, a savings account, some such thing, a current account, you get the terms, you understand them, what do you do, you say, no, if you don't want them, you say, yes, if you want them, you receive the terms, if, they suit you.

Surely, there's something, in this, to tell us, don't, don't, refuse, the terms, of peace, with God. Don't, refuse, the promises, in Jesus, brought, to fulfillment, and they will be brought, everyone, that's yet to be. Use, what you've been given, of the light, of the knowledge, of God's glory, shining as it is, in the face, in the person, of Jesus Christ.

Use the opportunity, because, the alternative to that, is the worst of all, it's, to, to, embark on darkness, deepening darkness, it will overtake us.

[21 : 03] Jude tells us, in verse 13, of his little, chapter book, those, who, refuse, to receive, the terms, are, like, wandering stars, for whom, is reserved, the blackness, of darkness, forever.

What a, dread, prospect. And so, you see, he, he puts the thing, in context, by nature, we're not, the people of God, but, God, acts, to change that, and has, been acting, both for Jews, and Gentiles, in bringing them in, to the people, of God.

And that brings us, secondly, to, our, final point, and that is, what they, become, by the mercy, of God.

Well, we've been anticipating this, I know, but we want to focus in, on it now. And, what they become, by the mercy of God, in a word, is the people of God, who were once, not a people, but are now, the people of God, who had not, obtained mercy, but now, have, obtained, mercy.

And, we're asked, to consider, more particularly, this, most, momentous, change, in, human beings, in the life, of an individual.

[22 : 40] And, he, he, deals with it, in the language, as we've been looking at, in the language, that applied, in the first place, and applies, in the first place, to Israelites.

It challenges, them, always, and in every generation. The gospel, is to the Jew, first. Its, primary, reference, and indeed, relevance, must be, to the Jew.

The Bible, we have, is a book, that was written, by Israelites, by Jews. God, chose, to do it, that way. And, there is simply, no denying it, apart from, Luke's gospel, the rest of it, is, is, is written, by holy men of old, moved as they were, by the spirit, but they were Jews.

And so, the gospel, the good news in Jesus, always has, relevance, to the Jewish people. And, what we're, looking at here, is, how they become, truly, the people of God.

They are brought, near, through the blood, of Jesus. It's interesting, that when Peter, was preaching, the gospel, to the Jews, at Pentecost, found there, in Acts 2, he talks, about, the promises, are to you, and to your children.

[24 : 15] that's where he starts, and to those, who are afar off, that's the Gentiles, to as many, as the Lord, our God, will call.

And, in a sense, there is a, a fittingness, that those, who are, are Jewish, from a, an Israelite, background, if you like, how fitting, it is, that they should, come into that number, the people of God, that they should be, really, and truly, through faith, in Jesus, the Messiah, the people, of God.

And, interesting it is, to, to go back, to Ephesians 2, when Paul is talking, about, eh, the contrast, between the Gentiles, and the Jews, he says, you, Gentiles, were strangers, to the covenants, of promise.

You were aliens, from the commonwealth, of Israel. You didn't belong, to the true people, of God. But, you have been, brought near, through, the blood, of Jesus.

You were excluded, from that citizenship. And, there wasn't, anywhere at all, you could be, considered, the people of God. But, through, coming to Christ, through, coming to the Christ, who came, to die, in the room, instead of sinners, you've obtained, mercy, from God.

[25 : 57] And, through faith in him, you become, part of that group, the people, of God, who were not, by nature, a people. But, you came, through the mercy of God, to be part of that group, the people, of God.

And, we read there, in Hosea, in chapter 1, in verse 6, verses 9 to 10, of how, we obtain, mercy. There's an interesting, reference there, in that passage, in Hosea, for all that, Israel had done, that was, antagonistic, to God.

It said, the children of Israel, shall be as the sand, of the seizure. That's not a reference, to the number of Jews, that would come in.

That's a reference, to the number of Gentiles, that would come in, together with believing Jews, to the true Israel of God. You go back over it. What the prophet said, about Israel, is that, only a remnant, will return.

[27 : 15] But God, would have the Gentiles, come in, to the true Israel, to the commonwealth, of Israel, to the, Mount Zion, as we read, in Hebrews 12, to the heavenly Jerusalem, we read it there again.

And all because, they obtained, the mercy, of God. God, in his, wonderful, compassion, operated, extended, mercy, to sinners.

That's what mercy is. It's God, reaching out, to the undeserving. Indeed, it's more than that. It's God, reaching out, to the ill-deserving. We were singing, in the psalm, with us, he dealt not, as we said.

Nor did, requite our ill. He didn't, he didn't, lay, the burden, of responsibility, upon us. No, he laid it, on his son.

That's the wonder, of the good news. He didn't, he didn't, require it, of us. He didn't, he didn't, repay us, for the evil, with death.

[28 : 34] But, he, graciously, mercifully, extended, great good, to us. We look at, the exercise, of God's, mercy to us, as sinners, in terms, of him, pouring out, his wrath, upon his son, on the cross, of Calvary, what we deserved, he inflicted, on his son.

Second, Corinthians 5, reminds us, verse 21, also, he made him, to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be constituted, the righteousness, of God, in him.

That's mercy. Second, Corinthians 5, 21, that's mercy. And, we should appreciate, the wonder, of the mercy of God, by which, we become, the people, of God.

In fact, to borrow again, to underscore the point, to borrow again, from Ephesians 2, he says to us, in verse 5, we were children, of wrath, like everybody else.

But, God, who is rich, in mercy, there it is, in his great love, wherewith he loved us, he has made us alive, in Christ.

[30 : 11] Christ. And, the more we understand, of our condition, by nature, and our position, in the sight of God, as sinners, by nature, the more, we will appreciate, the mercy of God, extended to us, in Christ, crucified.

for he was crucified, in the room instead, of undeserving, and of ill-deserving, sinners, who obtained, mercy.

Indeed, you don't need, to go far back, in this, first letter of Peter, to see, that, Peter, bursts, with a, a song of praise, in verse 3, chapter 1, to God, the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according, to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again, and to a living hope, through the resurrection, of Jesus Christ, from the dead.

It is, abundant mercy, mercy. And he did it, in order that we might become, through faith in his Son, the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but who now, have obtained, mercy.

And, let us be, let us be, unashamed to confess, that for our salvation, we are, entirely, dependent, upon the mercy, of God.

[31 : 59] This is, what gives us, hope, and encouragement. This is, what allows us, to dare, to say, by faith in Christ, I belong, to the people, of God.

It is, a realization, of what the mercy, of God is, to us, that helps us, drives, despair away, drives, wavering, and wandering, away, drives out, that sense, of hopelessness, we have a living hope, because of, the muchness, of the mercy, of God, in, Christ.

Christ. And, if you think about it, in terms of Israel, those who cried out, in utter hopelessness, and weakness, they received, the mercy of God.

When they were convicted, I go back to that sermon, in, in the Acts, chapter 2, when they were convicted, those thousands, at Pentecost, convicted, of sin, and their own, undone-ness, in the sight of God, men and brethren, they said to the apostles, what shall we do?

Believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ. Receive him, and experience, the mercy of God. Become, in truth, the people, of God.

[33 : 29] And so, let us be taught, of God, here, in this passage, while we are, on mercy's ground, to cry out, to him, who takes, the sinner, from the dark dungeon, of nature's night, and makes him, a child of light, yes, makes him, one who obtains, mercy, and who can say, I belong, to the people, of God.

Who once, were not, a people, but are now, the people of God, who had not, obtained, mercy, but now, have, obtained, mercy.

May he, assure our hearts, here, tonight, by faith, that we have, obtained, mercy, and are, of the number, of the people, of God.

God. And it is this, we can look forward, to the eternal day, when, in the perfection, of bodily resurrection, we will be, with the people, of God, when they are, openly, acknowledged, by all, the rational creatures, in the universe.

They will be, acknowledged, by God, before them, when he, makes up, his precious jewels, who were, once, not a people, lo a me, but, now are a me, my people, says God, who had, not obtained, mercy, mercy, but, who have, now, obtained, mercy.

[35 : 21] May he, bless to us, his word. Amen.