

The Privileges Belonging to Christ's Followers

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to 1 Peter, chapter 2, and we may just read from verse 7.

In thinking about Christ, the chief cornerstone, and he says, verse 7, And therefore to you who believe, he is precious.

But to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

They stumble being disobedient to the word to which they were also appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal 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.

These words. I want us just simply to think about the privileges belonging to Christ's followers. It doesn't mean all of them considered, but just some, as Peter highlights them here.

[1 : 31] And they are enormous privileges, amazing privileges, bestowed upon Christ's followers. But you, he says, are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people.

And you'll notice that in the context here, there's a marked contrast between those who were disobedient to the word of God, to the good news in Jesus, as the chief cornerstone, God's chosen elect stone put into his church.

And there's a marked contrast between those who were disobedient to that message and those who received it. There's a great gulf between the two groupings of people.

And therefore it's important to us to make sure, on the basis of the Bible's teaching, that we understand the truth concerning the difference between those who are Christ's and those who are not.

And here in verse 9, Peter is speaking by the Spirit of God of very positive things that we can say about the Lord's people.

[2 : 54] He says, here are the things that are bestowed. You are a chosen generation. You're a royal priesthood, a holy nation. His own special people.

You know, the fact of the matter is, when you look at yourself, and you know yourself, and you look at others who profess the Lord, we're in some ways a pretty motley crew.

We're beset by all sorts of things, physical things and psychological things. We're not perfect at all. We struggle with disabilities.

We struggle with old age. And infirmities in many ways. And it's important for us not to look at what we haven't got.

We're living in a day when, whether it's ladies, you see the glossy magazine, I look at them, but sometimes you go into a newsagency and you can hardly miss them.

[3 : 58] But the thing is, you see the ideal, ladies. And it's the same for the men. You see the so-called ideal. What a man should be like.

And it's a physical perfection. It's the same with the ladies. Physical perfection. That matters mega to people. And it is a distortion of what matters to God.

What matters to Jesus. And it's important for us, you see, to see the thing His way. His way. To see what He has given us in Christ.

Not what we're like, creaking and groaning, coughing and spluttering, seeing a little or nothing, hearing a little or nothing. And if you're like me, you've got a bedlam in your head with tinnitus.

You see, it's not the way we are physically that matters ultimately. It's what we are in Christ.

[5 : 00] What He has bestowed. The wonderful privileges. You are, He says, through faith understood, a chosen generation.

A royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people. Not because you're an example of physical perfection.

Or intellectual strength. Or academic attainment, simply considered.

But you have these wonderful privileges bestowed upon you by Him. I want to think about them briefly to encourage ourselves in what the Lord has done and is doing for His people.

First of all, He tells us that Christians are a chosen race. The word generation, again, means race. And what I want to begin with this, considering Christians as a chosen race, is to notice the biblical doctrine here of eternal election is right before our eyes.

[6 : 26] We can't avoid it. When He says chosen, He means elect. Elect from everlasting. If you go back to the very beginning of 1 Peter, and it is interesting that it's Peter, the first among equals.

Peter says at the very beginning of his letter, his first letter, to the Jews of the dispersion in the first place, who had believed the gospel, verse 2, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

You see? In sanctification of the Spirit for obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. And it's quite a natural and normal thing for him to say.

Elect means chosen. Chosen means elect in biblical language, in biblical terms. And this ought to be seen as a humbling thing to us.

It is bestowed. It is bestowed by God. It's His own eternal choice. But it is important to think about it. Because it's an amazing thing that God should choose into salvation, into eternal life, freely and sovereignly, sinners of mankind.

[7 : 55] It is something that is altogether wonderful. And we ought not to despise it, or try to rid our thinking of such a doctrine.

It's God's own revelation to us. And when we think about why He should do this, we were singing in the Psalm 135, He did it simply according to His good pleasure.

He did it because He chose to do it. It lies in the good pleasure of His will. Now, that is not only Old Testament. It is apostolic.

The apostles say the very same thing. It lies in the good pleasure of God. God was pleased to do that. And the fact of the matter is, if you know yourself, you will know that left to ourselves, we're not inclined, naturally, to go in the Lord's way.

If we were left to our own will, then we would be like the whole human race. We would go our own way. We would never obtain eternal life.

[9 : 10] We would never secure salvation. We would be wandering in darkness until our days were done here, and then out into darkness forever. That's the way it would be, left to ourselves.

But, says Peter, you were a chosen, you were an elect race. This is not something that is detached from the history of God's dealings with people.

It takes us right back to the beginnings of Israel as a nation considered. Of the nation that was formed in Egypt in bondage.

God, you remember, promised a way back some 430 years before they were brought out of Egypt. He promised Abraham his descendants would come out of Egypt.

Abraham himself was elected to salvation. The father of true believers. And then God brought out that nation because he chose to.

[10 : 21] He chose to set his love upon them. He didn't choose them because there was something particularly desirable about them. Indeed, the testimony of God concerning Israel can be summed up in this.

A people not right in heart whose spirit was not steadfast. They rebelled more and more. That's their story. Of course, there were people within Israel.

There was an Israel within Israel. People truly committed to the promises of God. A people who believed in and hoped for the coming of the Saviour Messiah.

And they were loyal to their covenant commitments and trusted in the Lord. This is a wee digression for a moment. But one of the lovely things about those who were waiting for Messiah to come in the days when he came.

There was a community. A believing community. They were waiting for the redemption of Israel.

That is, they were waiting for the Redeemer. And in the Christmas story, if I can put it that way, we find in the heart of it, people were waiting and praying and looking and longing.

[11 : 44] They were part of that chosen race. Israel within Israel. But in general, the people were passed by because of their unbelief.

Their rebellion. And therefore, you see, to bring this up to date, we who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ must make much of the honour bestowed, this wonderful privilege of being part of that elect

race, that chosen generation as it is here.

We must glory in God's sovereign choice. Ours is not to get bogged down in excuses for our unbelief by saying, am I elect?

Maybe I'm not. Probably I'm not. That's not the way to reason. The word is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And all the rest will be seen in its appropriate place.

It will never be able to say at the judgment seat, you know, you're going to cast me away because I wasn't elect. That will not do.

[12 : 59] We'll be cast aside because we didn't believe the report. And therefore, we make much of this, I love the words in the psalm, remember me, Lord, with the love that you have to your own, to your elect, and visit me with your salvation.

What a lovely prayer to make to the Lord. Remember me, O Lord. Where did we hear that? In a most amazing place, an ugly place, a place where all hell was let loose.

More than that, a place where God caused his wrath to fall upon his sin. But we hear there, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Hayom, today, you shall be with me in paradise. Remember me, O Lord. What's wrong with putting those words in your heart and in your mouth and using them to the Lord?

And then glory in being part of that chosen race by faith. Second thing is Christians are a royal priesthood.

[14 : 17] That's what he says. A royal priesthood. And here again, you see, this takes us back to Exodus 19.

That's why we read that passage. It wasn't because we wanted a long and difficult read. We read it because it's where we get these realities.

I hate using the word concepts because it's more than concepts. They're realities. That's what God made Israel.

Exodus 19.6 You are a royal priesthood. And it's clear that in the apostolic thinking, this was transferred on to what we call the Church of Christ.

But we mustn't think of that in terms of cutting the tie between the old and the new.

[15 : 26] Not at all. It's a developing on. The Church was in Israel. The Church just means the assembled people of God.

And the Church was as much in the wilderness, said Stephen, as it was right the way through the days of the prophets to the very last.

It was there when the Saviour came. It was weak, one admits. But it was there. And he says, he says, you are, you are, you are, you are, Jews and Gentiles united in the Messiah, Jesus, the Saviour.

you are, a royal priesthood. I like Calvin's comment on this and I'm going to quote him. He says, Moses, talking to Israel, Moses called your fathers a sacred kingdom because the whole people, as it were, enjoyed a royal liberty.

And from their body were chosen chosen the priests. And he goes on to say this, but now you, the church, are royal priests, and indeed in a more excellent way because you are each consecrated in Christ that you may be the associates of his kingdom and part of his priesthood.

[17 : 10] We are, if by faith today in Christ, then we are part of his priesthood, our royal priesthood.

It's interesting and I want to just dwell for a few moments on this word royal. Obviously here it's an adjective that governs priesthood, but that's actually not the way the word is used.

Ordinarily the word in the original is used as a noun. And therefore I go along with the view that what is being said here is you are a royal residence priesthood.

You are a royal residence priesthood. In other words, the king lives in you. And that seems to me to be a good way to understand what is being said here.

And so when we read a royal priesthood we think a royal residence priesthood. This ties in, if I may say it, it ties in much better with verse five, you also as living stones are being built up a spiritual house, you see, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[18 : 44] And you may recall in Ephesians we are told that we are indwelt by the Spirit who is building as a holy dwelling place for God.

you see the point, a royal residence priesthood. The king is in residence by his Spirit. And therefore we want to see that too as a wonderful privilege.

Not looking at our weak and frail mortal frame. Not looking at our weakening mental powers.

But looking at the truth as it is in Jesus, not what we see, but what is true from heaven's standpoint in the privilege bestowed.

A royal residence for the king. But a priesthood nonetheless, a body of priests in Christ. And the emphasis lies here in the second place, on this wonderful honor bestowed that people who are natively, naturally, not fit to serve God in any meaningful way, are made fit.

[20 : 12] We're made fit. We're purified through the blood of Jesus. Jesus, we're sanctified through the body of Jesus, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

Hebrews 13, verses 12, and then 15 and 16, sum all this up beautifully. we're sanctified through the blood of Jesus, the body of Jesus, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, so that we can offer up spiritual service and worship to God, which is acceptable in the Savior.

and this, you see, ought to encourage us, because it is what he has bestowed upon us, what is reality from his standpoint, not the glossy magazine, not the image of today.

He takes us and makes us priests into God. And it's something that's true in a spiritual way of men and women, boys and girls, who have received the Lord Jesus.

And it ought to encourage us and enable us to magnify him, to exalt him for his goodness and his mercy.

[21 : 50] What great things the Lord has done for us. A royal residence priesthood. Well, we'll have to leave that, the time's whizzing on.

And the last thing we want to think about here is that Christians are a holy nation, his special people.

And here again, you see, we get these ideas, we get this reality from Exodus 19. If you go back there to Exodus 19 and from verse 6, you shall see, God says, you shall be to me a holy nation.

That is to say, a people separated from the nations of the world. The Psalms tell us there was never any nation like Israel, a nation so blessed by God.

And of course that makes it all the more serious that they should reject the God of salvation. That they simply wouldn't accept his Messiah Savior.

[23 : 13] Tragic it is that they became proud of what they were in themselves, that they imagined that their own being, the people, that there were certain qualities and abilities that entitled them to be a special people, a holy nation.

But the fact is there was nothing inherent in them that warranted God's favor. The Lord tells us that in Deuteronomy 7, the Lord didn't choose you because you were a special people.

In fact, he chose them despite their own native rebellion and their obstinate ways.

No, he chose them simply because he chose to choose them, to set his love upon. And the truth is that the prophets had to say in the Lord's name again and again that they were a hard and stiff-necked people, a people not right in heart, as we've said.

You see, in verse 5 of Exodus 19, we read these words, Now if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then, then, you shall be a special treasure to me.

[24 : 47] God's love and that brings us up to date, because those who are that holy nation, that spiritual theocracy, if you like, through faith in Christ, we are his if we hold fast our commitment, if we obey the truth of the gospel.

It stands to reason, Jesus said, you'll know them by their fruits. He is not blessed, who is a hearer of the word, but a doer of the word, who takes the word and puts it into practice, who gives evidence that the king is in residence, that he's working in the life.

God's God's love and we must see ourselves not as special because of ourselves simply, or part of that holy nation, that spiritual theocracy where God reigns, not because of anything that is qualitatively different about ourselves, no, no, it's about God, it's about what he works.

Christians are holy and special in the sense that God is at work, the king resides there, the spirit of grace and of God is working.

And that is something that is bestowed, as we've already seen, and something to praise God for. To think that I am made a special treasure of the Lord.

[26 : 36] To think that I'm part of that spiritual theocracy, a holy nation, a special people, is something that ought to move us and encourage us to God be the glory.

And you see, it also ought to strengthen in us a determination, a result, to go on in his ways, to do things his way.

What does the Lord require of you, believer? To walk arrogantly? No. To be aloof and distant?

No. but to live mercy, to do justly, and to walk humbly with your God.

And in that frame, we will be glad to proclaim him, see, Peter goes on to say that, that you may proclaim the praises of him, not sing your own praises and blow your own trumpet, but sing the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[28 : 00] Somebody had a saying, and it's a good one. Our business is to lay the sinner low and lift the Savior high.

that's what happened in our own experience if we're in Christ here today. He made sure that we were laid low in the dust, that we saw ourselves in the way he sees us, in our sin, and he lifted us before us, Christ in all his excellence, in his suitability as our Savior, and he lifted us up in him. Love lifted me, said the songwriter. Love lifted me. When no one else could say, love lifted me. That's what we see. and because we see that by the grace of God, we want others to be laid low like we were laid low in order to be lifted up in the Savior.

And we do that by lifting the Savior. I, said Jesus, if I be lifted up, will draw all people to me.

[29 : 25] That's our business. You see, he says, his holy nation, his own special people, purpose, close, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness, yes, out of darkness, and ignorance, and arrogance, into his marvelous light.

Let us be swift, my dear friends, to record in the hearing of others, that he drew us to the light, and shone in our hearts, that he brought us to himself, and enlightened us in his knowledge and faith. Let's glory in the privileges bestowed by him, and bid others to come with us in the way. And as we do this, let us bear in mind that through faith in Christ we belong forever to him, to the king who is in residence by his divine spirit, and whose kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and who is coming again to receive that kingdom in all its fullness to himself, and to renew the earth and the heavens, the whole universe, to make it a fit dwelling for his spiritual temple.

But you are an electress, a royal residence priesthood, a holy spiritual theocracy, his own special people, in order that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

May we be encouraged in him, and glory in him. Amen.