

God's People and Their Mission

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[0 : 00] Now we'll return with me again this evening to 1st Peter and to chapter 2 of 1st Peter reading at verse 9. 1st Peter chapter 2 at verse 9.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Even for experienced Christians, it can be very difficult at times if they are constantly belittled, especially in public. If they are denigrated, if their commitment is called into question. So many different ways by which the world and opponents of the gospel can actually belittle us. So that we end up at times, maybe even coming near to believe that we are just insignificant really after all.

[1 : 16] And that we are tempted just to slacken off or to give up. And it gets to you. It gets to you even with Christian support. And there are people in the congregation here that know that.

Because their own profile is more public than that of others. And yet, we know that that is their standing, their gift of God. So that they are in support of his cause and of the gospel using those gifts.

But that attracts such a lot of opposition. And that is really something like what the people in Peter's day were like when he was writing this letter to these scattered people all over these regions, as we saw at the very beginning.

And as you go through the letter, we will see that they are belittled. They are being treated really spitefully. They are being denied certain rights. They have all sorts of things to contend with. And Peter is addressing that in many of the passages throughout the rest of this letter. So what do you do when you feel so belittled and when you are conscious of being belittled and when you are feeling at times like, well, you are just not significant really after all in any sense in the service of God.

[2 : 33] Well, what Peter is doing here is taking them back to what they are as God's people. That is so important.

What they are as God's people. Because the danger is that we, in order to try and maintain some sort of confidence and some sort of assurance that we are doing the Lord's work, the danger is that we would actually just add more work to what we are doing.

And we are still feeling, even after that, that we are very small and we are very insignificant and very inadequate to face the world and all its arguments and all the might of all the different types of opponents that you meet with against the gospel.

So you have to come back to what you are in Christ. What you are as God's people. What God has made you. What status God has given you. And that is where you begin.

You don't come to think of what you do before you actually think of what you are. So you don't try and add more work to what you are already doing. That is fine in its own place.

[3 : 40] As long as you don't overdo it. But it is so important again and again to come back, as Peter is doing here, to remind these people of what they are. Not just who they are, but what they are.

What they are in terms of status and of God's status as given to you. You are a chosen race. You are a royal priesthood. You are a holy nation. You are a people for his own possession.

And not only does he say, this is what you are. But then he adds to that, why they are what they are. These are the two points we are going to look at this evening.

What God's people are. And secondly, why God's people are what they are. And he says that in the final part of the passage, verse 9 especially.

You are this, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[4 : 39] And he is contrasting that of course with their antagonists and with the people who are different to that. Who don't have that status. And who think that they are the ones who really matter in the world.

And who want us to believe that what they believe is what really matters. And what their status is, is the status that really matters. And God is saying, actually this is what matters.

You, my people, you are a chosen race. You are a royal priesthood. You are a holy nation. You are a people for my own possession, God is saying.

And you are that, that you may proclaim my excellencies in the presence of a watching world. And of course this is important too, just as it happens to fit in, in God's providence with our approach to the Lord's Supper.

It's important that we come to the Lord's Supper, putting Christ first of course, what he is to us.

What he remains to us, what he's always been and always will be to us.

[5 : 42] It's all about Christ. But then, very close to that, you actually take with you what you are in Christ. What Christ has made you. You go to the Lord's table, not because you are good enough to go there in yourself.

You go to the Lord's table, not because you have earned it. You go to take communion, firstly because of what Christ has done to you. But secondly, because of what you are in him. That gives you the right.

That gives you the privilege. That gives you the duty to come and remember him. In the death he died. As you take communion. As an act of remembrance.

So first of all, what God's people are. But you are a chosen race. Now we saw the word chosen used early near the beginning of looking at 1 Peter.

Right at the very outset there he calls them those who are elect exiles of the dispersion. So right away he's plunged them into thinking of what they are as God's people.

[6 : 46] Now he's expanding on that. You are a chosen race. Now you could say that the word race there would mean something significant.

And it does. It doesn't mean race in the ordinary way in which we use a race. Most of us are of the Celtic race perhaps. And there may be a whole admixture of different races that have come into our bloodstream.

But we are by and large Celtic people. And you could say that's our race. But what Peter is doing here is saying you've got all of these different races in the ordinary sense.

But they've been combined as God has by his grace saved his people and chosen his people.

They're combined into one race. They're a spiritual race. Because this word is related to the idea of citizenship.

Here they are you see. They're scattered through all these regions. They're facing all of these different opponents that are belittling them and finding fault with them.

[7 : 48] And even in the following verses you'll see there when they speak against you as evildoers in verse 12. That they may see your good deeds and so on. He's reminding them this is what you're facing.

This is the difficulty you're facing. This is the setting. This is the framework in which God has placed your lines. So think of what you are. Think of what you are in that setting he's saying.

You have a citizenship. You belong to this spiritual race. You are God's chosen people. Similar to what you find in Philippians.

In Philippians 3 Paul is there actually reminding the Philippians that their citizenship is in heaven. Or their place of citizenship is in heaven.

Where the Lord Jesus Christ is. They were citizens of Rome in the ordinary sense. They had their names because Philippi was a Roman city. A city that was important in the Roman Empire.

[8 : 49] You could say their names were actually on the citizen's roles in the capital Rome. Which governed the whole empire. They could find their names there. But you see Peter is saying here as Paul was saying there.

Actually that's not in the highest sense. Your capital city at all. It is heaven. You're a chosen race. You're God's people. You're citizens of heaven. And so when you face ideas that somehow or other you're inferior in your thinking.

To the thinking of the world. To the thinking of the secularist. To the thinking of the atheist. To all these arguments that you face that seem to be such mighty arguments. Such persuasive arguments.

And that will say to you well you know if you just opened your mind. Rather than just accepting the teachings you find in this Bible. Literally. If you opened your mind. You wouldn't be as inferior as you are.

But until you open your mind properly. You're still going to remain inferior. You're not going to attain the level of competence. That you find in people of the world. Who rejected Christianity. And who are saying it's actually out of date.

[9 : 54] It's out of fashion. No God is saying. You're the people. Who are a chosen race. You're the ones who are elevated by God.

So that you're not in any sense inferior. We have to remind ourselves of that. That we don't go about thinking. Well actually.

I just wish I were on that level of ability. Or of competence. That the people of the world are on. When they can argue so cogently. For what they believe and choose to disbelieve.

God is saying. You are a chosen race. You're my people. Your citizenship is in heaven. Nothing like that. Nothing to compare with it. Unique. And you're secondly a royal priesthood.

You're a royal priesthood. Now we saw that priesthood a bit earlier on as well. When it says in the spiritual house. In the previous verses there.

[10 : 54] In verse 5. You're being built up like living stones. Being built up as a spiritual house. To be a holy priesthood. To offer spiritual sacrifice. In a sense.

Peter is opening up on that. Saying here. That you are actually a royal priesthood. And you cast your mind back to the Old Testament. And there's one instance there.

Of a king called Uzziah. And you'll find it in 2 Chronicles. Chapter 26. Uzziah was in many respects. A good king. But he became very proud. And pride as the Bible says.

Always goes before a fall. And in his pride. And in his sense of self-importance. Uzziah decided. To do something which was. Prohibited for kings.

Or anyone else to do. Apart from the Levitical priesthood. And that was to offer incense. Or to take part of. Take part in the ritual of the temple. So he went into the temple.

[11 : 50] And he had a censer with incense. And a priest along with companions. Went in to stop him doing. What he was intending to do. And we read that Uzziah was angry.

And then something remarkable happened. Leprosy broke out on his forehead. And he rushed out of the place. God you see had struck him.

Because he had so deliberately flouted. What God himself had prohibited. Royalty. And priesthood. And priesthood. And priesthood. Were strictly separate. All the way through the Old Testament.

Except when you look at the passages. Dealing with the Messiah. With the coming of Jesus. Because these two great offices. Of the priesthood. And of the kingship. Were to be united in him.

And they are united in him. He is our great high priest. But he is also our king. And in him. He is both prophet. Priest and king. As you know. And these two elements here.

[12 : 54] Priesthood and royalty. He has these. Ultimately in himself. He is the royal one. And he is the high priest. Of his people. And remarkably.

Those two qualities. If you like to call them. Qualities or attributes. They actually follow into his people. Because they are joined to Jesus. They have given royal status.

They are children of the king. And they are a priesthood. In the sense we saw earlier. In verse 5. They comprise. That body of people. That offer.

Sacrifices of praise to God. You are built up. A spiritual house. A holy priesthood. To offer worship to God. You are in advance.

Of the Old Testament. God has given you. Greater privileges. Jesus. Because he has bestowed upon you. Both royalty. And priesthood.

[13 : 53] To worship him. And to worship him. As a royal people. Isn't that a huge. Huge privilege. Tonight. Think of what royalty means. In the ordinary sense.

Think of royalty. In the sense of the royal family. The queen. And her household. Especially the queen herself. And the royalty. That is attached to her. And the status that goes with it. And the privileges that come with it.

Well God is saying. In the spiritual sense. That is what my people are. That is what my people have. That is what they are. They are royal. I see them as.

Royal. Like the head. Jesus himself. They bear that characteristic. Because. They are united to him. Thirdly.

He says. You are a holy nation. A chosen race. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. They are set apart. In other words. That is the primary idea.

[14:49] Of being holy. It begins with God's separation. Of his people. God setting them apart. To be his own people. God setting them off. Distinctly. From the people. That he draws them out of.

He has called them out of darkness. Into his marvelous light. And that means. He has brought them. To be distinct. As his people. He set them apart. To be his own people. He set them apart. To serve himself in the world.

To witness to himself in the world. That is what it means. To be a holy people. Although it also then. Follows into the idea. Of living a holy life. It is not just holy.

In the sense of God. Setting you apart. But God also. Requiring us. To live a holy life. To live. A life that. Deals with sin.

Seriously. And seeks to live. Righteously. In word. And in thought. And in action. You see that's again. Such an important thing.

[15:44] For Israel. This is going back. To the old testament. And in fact. To exodus. Where God has said. Of the people of Israel. That he is separating them. To be a people. To himself.

And that as he is. Setting them apart. To be a people. To himself. So they are to be his witnesses. In the presence of the nations around them. The pagan nations around them. Must see that they are not the same.

As themselves. That these people of God are different. Because God has made them different. And we need. To remind ourselves. Constantly of that. As God's people.

We are not the same. As the world. We were the world. We are no longer the world. We bear that distinctness. As a holy nation.

A holy people. A body of people. That have been set apart. For God. And by God. So that we will be seen as.

[16:42] His people. Now that means that. There is a very important. Evangelistic. Or witnessing thrust. To the way in which we live.

As the people of God. We said at the beginning. That is very difficult. When you are constantly belittled. When your. Whole motives are called into question. Where nasty things are said about you.

And especially when that is public. But what that is actually doing. When you are standing your ground. And revealing. Your commitment to Christ. And your love for Christ.

And when you are trying to do it. As much as possible. In a tactful. And loving way. What really is happening there. Is important. It is really that God. Is being displayed. And we will see in a minute. What that means. In proclaiming the excellency. Of him. Who called you out of darkness. Into his light. Because. When you are standing for Jesus. And for the things of God. And when you are taking steps.

[17:35] To come more and more. Onto his side publicly. Including coming. To take communion. And to come to the Lord's table. Which in it's own place. Is a step of witness.

And a step that is. A privilege for us to do. And. And. Well. When you then find. People having an issue. With that. And people making public comments. About.

Your stand. And your commitment. To things which they see. As just ancient rituals. God is saying. You are actually doing me a service. Remember. You are a holy nation to me.

You are distinct. To bear my name. I am using you. As the means. By which. I am setting myself. Before. Those people that find.

Fault with you. And accuse you. In other words. A holy nation. Is a conscience. To the world. Bears the truth of God.

[18:31] So that it actually continues. To reach through. To the conscience. Of the world. And then it says. A people. For his own possession.

You know. The older style. Translation of that. Which. Sometimes you smile at. Understandably. It's a peculiar people. And we're.

Aware of that. Of course. From the AV. And from. The familiarity. With the term. God's people. Are a peculiar people. And it doesn't mean it. Of course. In the ordinary sense.

Of peculiar. But in the sense here. In which. It is a people. For his own possession. A peculiar people. In the sense of being unique. Unique. As God. Has made them unique.

But it actually means. Really. Goes back again. To Exodus. Where. Where God said. Of the people. Of Israel. That he had. Chosen them. To himself.

[19 : 26] To be. His own special treasure. Or peculiar people. Or a people of his possession. And. It means. Essentially. That he has made them.

His treasured. Possession. He regards them. As his special treasure. His special possession. He looks upon them.

As he looks at no other. I have a wee box. In my study. At home. Just up on one of the shelves. And inside. Is an old lady's watch.

Not much to look at. It's been well worn. It's not even working anymore. Doesn't keep the time. You know.

But if you offered me. A very expensive Rolex watch. And put it beside it. And asked me. Which one I would rather choose. I'd choose this one. I'd reject the Rolex.

[20 : 26] And I'd take this one. Why? Because it was my mother. And was given to my mother. By my father. Early on in that married life.

It's special to me. I wouldn't change it. For anything else. When I look at it. I say. That's a treasured possession. So meaningful to me.

And I wouldn't exchange it. For anything else. Well God is saying. That's how I see my people. They're my special possession. They're precious to me.

They mean so much to me. I know what we're going to remember. Next Lord's Day. God willing. Is. It's. It's. It's the greatest expression. Of how precious.

God's people are to him. A people of his own possession. A special treasure to him. Because he went so far. As to purchase them. With the blood of his son. Christ died.

[21 : 29] To make these people. the people of God, the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation a people for his own possession and keep a hold of that when you feel the bite of the world and if you're not a Christian yet please consider this this is actually what you're still outside of this is what you need to come into possession of to be part of this wonderful people made wonderful by God because we're not any more deserving than anyone else that we should be Christians but when God has made us to be so and at such great cost as the death of his son well then we're a people of his own possession and we can say that we're proud of that not proud in the wrong sense but proud in the sense in which we appreciate what God has done now he says this is what you are and he reinforces that if you go to verse 10 that's why we read Hosea because he's quoting there pretty much directly from Hosea chapter 1 and chapter 2 once you were not a people but now you are God's people once you have not received mercy but now you have received mercy and you remember Hosea had that difficult life where he had to follow the command of God to take a wife of Hordom and bear children of Hordom and the children were called symbolically to do with the judgment of God

Jezreel Lo-Ruhamah the daughter not pity not given mercy and then the third one the son Lo-Ami not my people and yet God turned that you see and all the way through the Bible God is doing this even as he turned Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden he very soon came towards them in mercy to assure them this is not the end of it death is not the victor I'm going to make provision that the seed of the woman will come and bruise the head of the serpent the promise of life the promise of eternal life the same in Hosea God is going to change the thing round there are going to be people yet who will come to be said that they are his people the Gentiles are going to come to know the grace of Christ and they are going to be conjoined to those who in the Old Testament sense were following on as a Jewish people of God now they are combined into this one people of God a people for his own possession a people who were once not a people but now are the people of God that itself is an interesting reference isn't it when you think he is saying that you were not once you were not a people well they existed they were a people in the sense of having a country natively that they belonged to but they were not a people in this sense they had not been conjoined together into a spiritual body of people to bear the name of God to be his people but now he says you are

and look at these two words once and now once you are not this but now you are what's made the difference what's the bridge across from not once to now you are it's conversion isn't it that's coming to know Christ it's coming to be saved to be delivered from sin from its guilt from its bondage once this was not the case this is not what we were once but now you are now you are God's people now that the change has taken place now that you've been converted now that you've come to know Jesus now that you've come to know God as your father through him now you are God's people a people for his own possession who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous life we could spend a lot of time on that of course and that imagery is there very commonly in the Bible but what a vivid way of describing the difference between what we were and what we now are what God's people now are in context to what they were once you were not a people now you are once you were in darkness now you have been delivered from that darkness he's called you out of it into his marvelous light God doesn't call us out of something and then just leave you in nowhere he calls you out of something into something better he called the people of Israel out of Egypt out of that bondage and he called them into or towards the promised land he called us out of darkness into his marvelous light

I understand that when they were planning at Wheaton College in Illinois in the USA when they were planning a center there to be called the Billy Graham Center that the architects were wondering how they would actually represent architecturally the basic thrust of the gospel and what they did was they set about a passageway that was dark and led into a room the sides of which were just filled with brilliant light to illustrate this great point that God has delivered his people out of darkness and into this marvelous light and what Peter is saying is you've come through that passageway you've come through that dark alleyway that's where you once lived and now you're in the room that's filled with light you're in Christ you are God's people what God's people are and that's what you are when you're in Christ tonight that's what we are together as God's people and that's what we need to constantly remember or else we'll become disconsolate under the pressure of the world but briefly in closing why God's people are what they are so that you may call so that you would proclaim his excellencies of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light that you may proclaim the excellencies of him now the excellencies there really mean essentially his mighty saving acts it can be translated virtues or even attributes because that's essentially what's happening when we live for God we are in a sense putting God on display remember

Paul again in Philippians and when he's talking there about the tension between where he is and where he depart and be with Christ which is far better but what he's saying is this whether it's a life by life or by death whether it's by continuing this world or leaving this world to depart and be with Christ this he says is what I'm committed to that Christ may be magnified in my body that Christ may be magnified in my body well when you take a magnifying glass or something like that what you're doing is taking something that's very small to your natural vision and enlarging it what you do when you blow up a picture it's the same thing you're magnifying it and that's what Paul is saying and that's really in a sense what Peter is saying here as well you're to proclaim the excellencies of him you are to magnify the Lord you're not to carry about in your life I know this is a challenge certainly to myself as well and I feel very inadequate when I'm preaching this because I know I fall short of myself that I have to say to myself daily am I showing to the world a miniature of Jesus a passport photo of

[29 : 51] Jesus rather than a magnified blown up image is my life one that's just satisfied with just showing the tiniest bit of Christ and living by that or am I living to proclaim the excellencies these saving mighty deeds of God through living for him as much as I can well you see that too is related to coming to the Lord's table the Lord's table is not primarily a means of witness we have to remember that it's not in the first place a means of witnessing to Christ it's a means of grace for Christ to feed your soul but following on from that it's obviously a means of witness when you step forward and you say this is now what I owe to Jesus I must do it for him and as I do it for him I receive the benefit myself to proclaim the excellencies of him the word proclaim again is translated different ways in various translations to show forth to proclaim but it doesn't mean just to say something verbally like to proclaim in preaching what you take from it actually is that this is in fact the central calling of the church to live as a worshipping people of

God that's our central purpose in life to worship God nothing else is to be put above that whatever you think of in terms of practical outreach and evangelism and all of these things hugely important

though they are they are all based on being a worshipping people you must never put them above being a worshipping people and you know that's why we insist on something such as the Lord's day and the keeping of the Lord's day why is it important well it's important because this is really at the very centre of it and our keeping of it that we are a worshipping people and you know people just don't get it of course they don't get it because they're still in darkness and need to be delivered into as marvelous light before they get the meaning of the Lord's day and what it's about and what the keeping of it is about but we have to insist on the fact that it's not primarily about whether people work on the Lord's day or not important though that is too to secularize the Lord's day means that you increasingly you increasingly place a barrier to people fulfilling the chief end of their creation which is to worship God

I know that people won't accept that that people will not really take that as a valid argument at all they'll say but it's my choice not to worship God and you have to say yes but that's not your right it's God's rights we're talking about and you're denying him his rights by doing something other than worshipping him on the Lord's day and Peter is reminding us here this is why we exist as Christians to proclaim his excellencies and to do that means especially through worshipping his name through gathering together to praise him to worship him which itself of course is evangelistic be under no illusion you can see it in fact from the responses of those who wanted to open up louder on the Lord's day and other not just that but other issues as well that want to actually encroach on the Lord's day and more and more open it out and come to regard it as just a secular day like any other day you can see that in regard to that what's missed out on of course is the fact that the witness of God's people in worship is itself evangelistic you don't have to actually go through the streets and start talking to people in order to be an evangelist in order to have an evangelistic element to your life you have an evangelistic element to your life by being here tonight because that world that's watching you is actually being told by your presence here that there is such a being as God they may not accept it but they can't avoid the fact that you're testifying to it and being here to worship him is the central tenet of your life and whatever interferes with that or wants to overturn that or place a barrier against that for people that is a serious mistake it's denying human beings fulfilling the purpose for which they were created to worship God so that's really in a sense the mission of the church to proclaim the excellencies of God the very saving character of God and to do so preeminently through worshipping him through proclaiming him in worship and being a worshipping people which itself makes the people distinct from those who want to be something different to a worshipping people so tonight friends remember as Christians remember what you are don't ever think that the status

God has given you is somehow less than the status that belongs to others in the world don't ever think that your royalty and your priesthood and your being a special possession of God is anything other than your highest privilege don't ever think that you're what you may think of as feeble efforts and supposing you're not able to do anything but to come to worship him here that's not feeble that makes its mark that itself has a thrust to it in the presence of the world that would say on a night like this surely these people have something there's a mystery about it they take note of it that you are people of God let's pray Lord our

[36 : 23] God help us we pray to appreciate increasingly what your people are by your grace to realize the status that you give us as a people who belong to yourself enable us we pray all the more to be determined to serve you to speak for you when we are able to do so to use the gift you have given us whatever they may be in order to proclaim your excellencies in order to show your attributes but we know Lord that we live in the presence of a people of a world who don't read your word and yet read the lives of your people we pray that as they read our lives they may indeed see you and may come to know you through your blessing receive our thanks we pray and pardon all our sin for Jesus sake Amen our closing psalm this evening is psalm number 89 psalm 89 page 345 singing verses 15 to 18 and the tune is

Newington again these are verses which remind us of the status that God has given to his people and God himself as their God oh greatly blessed the people are the joyful sound that know the brightness of thy face O Lord they ever on shall go verses 15 to 18 in conclusion O let him let the keep the Lord the joyful sound alone and bright as of thy peace O Lord they ever on they grandfather

On the glory of their strength, the Holy Spirit, and in thy favor shall accord, and the exalted be. For God is our defense and key, to us the safety bring.

The Holy One of Israel, is an almighty King.

[39 : 47] I'll go to the side note here this evening. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and evermore.

Amen.