

Dec 1st 2013: First Peter series #7 "A Privileged People". 1 Pet 2:4-10

In 1 Peter 2:4-5 Peter writes this:

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

These words have a depth of meaning that becomes clearer to us when we recall once more the situation of those people to whom Peter wrote this letter. Chapter 1:1 says:- ***Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,***

The readers were Christians who had been forced away from their own homes and country because of the persecution they had endured on account of their new found faith. A fact that Peter mentions later on in his letter.

They had been scattered and had found refuge in countries that are now part of modern day Turkey where they were considered to be strangers. Refugees. People who were seen as just a little weird because of what they believed—This new religious group they were part of—and were once again facing persecution because of that.

Consequently they would have seen themselves as under privileged rather than privileged, and in so many ways they were. And yet in the verses we are looking at today Peter stresses that they, and indeed all Christians from that time onwards, are a Privileged People indeed.

Privileged because we have this amazing purpose to perform. As Peter goes on to say in 2:6

For in Scripture it says:

***'See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.'***

We know that Jesus is this precious corner stone that God has established on this earth. He is the living Stone that was rejected by men when He was crucified, but because of His resurrection He lives and gives eternal life to all

who trust in Him. Despite all that happens to them including death itself, they will never be put to shame. Never abandoned or forgotten by Him.

But the really great thing says Peter, is that once we believe in Him we too become living stones and we are called to come together and unite with Him to become this living, spiritual house that we call Church.

Church is not bricks and mortar—It's people united together by their commitment to Jesus Christ to become God's new house or Temple on earth.

The majority of these Christians it seems, to whom Paul wrote, had been Jews before they were converted. Once they claimed Jesus as God's Son they were banned from the Temple in Jerusalem where sacrifices were made to God by the priests, and eventually they were made to leave their own land because of the persecution that arose. Acts 8:1 tells us that after the martyrdom of Stephen:-

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

For the Jew the Temple and the sacrifices that only Jews could offer there was incredibly important. To be told that you can't come here anymore to meet with God was to be cast out from the Faith they had followed since birth, and it would have been a severe test of their Faith in Jesus as God the Son. As the Messiah.

Imagine how they felt when they heard from Peter that they, living breathing people, were God's new Temple. They were the new priesthood and they were the ones now offering sacrifices pleasing to God. And they were not animal sacrifices to atone for sins but the praise of God from hearts committed to Him. The giving of themselves to His mission in this world. The using of their gifts, resources, lives to show forth the love of God to the needy, the broken, the wanderers, so that the world would see God's love and greatness expressed within His people and give Him the glory.

This quotation from the Interpreter's Bible puts it so well:

"The various religions of the world have all erected their temples. The Christian faith reared the Gothic cathedral, perhaps the "most magnificent creation which the mind of man has thrown out of itself." But what religion can fashion such a temple of living persons as that which Jesus Christ has built in all the world? This "house not built with hands" is ecumenical and embraces the consecrated lives

of peoples in nearly every part of the inhabited globe. The temple in Jerusalem may lie in dust, but the "spiritual house" of a living Christ continually attracts to itself persons who gladly allow themselves to be builded into the living walls of Christ's increasing and growing city."

"They are associated by reason of their calling and their common new life; they are destined to reveal and fulfill the purpose of God for the whole human race. They are commissioned to be a kingly community of persons who mediate between God and man; who worshipfully make God central in life and use their gifts for the service of mankind."

If we claim to belong to Christ then that is who we are. And such is the purpose we are to fulfill.

But, says Peter, as well as being a Privileged People because of this great purpose that is ours, **we are especially Privileged because of how God now sees us.** 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Sometimes I do feel that we who are Christians can be treated by others as slightly inferior to them—as second class citizens, and at times maybe, we can even fall into the trap of thinking that about ourselves. The initial readers of this letter would have definitely been treated that way by their fellow Jews and by many of the people that they now lived amongst. Indeed the title Christian was at the beginning used as a term of derision...as a put down, especially for those who had come out of the Jewish Faith.

So to be assured that in God's sight you are just so special is a real encouragement. In fact JB Philips in his paraphrase of these verses says:-

all the old titles of God's people now belong to you.

And that is so true, for the terms Peter uses are straight from the OT, and by using them he is stressing that they have not stopped being God's people. But by accepting God's chosen Messiah as their Saviour they have shown themselves to be the true people of God. God's church chosen in the Son before the world began.

And all those titles Peter uses belong to each one of us whatever our standing in Jesus Christ. We together are a chosen people because we responded to His call of love upon our hearts. Because we acknowledged that desire deep in our hearts to know God as our Father.

And God sees us as a royal priesthood able to approach Him with the needs and concerns of ourselves and others. As a holy nation and as His special possession.

If you have ever had someone or something that you loved as your special possession then you can begin to understand how God views you. But you can only begin to understand, because God knows you intimately. All your weaknesses, flaws, failings, and secrets, and He will never stop loving you as his special possession.

And He especially loves the Body of believers that is His church for he has taken us from being not a people, and He has made us the people of God. He has seen us as not deserving mercy, and yet has swamped our lives with His mercy given freely and lovingly.

Can you imagine how those Christian refugees in a strange land felt when they heard these words. At last they belonged. They had a King who was God in whose sight they were precious.

And today if your life is linked into God's Kingdom through Jesus then you belong too. You too are precious to the Father. And together with all His people we have been given the most wonderful task of all.

To declare the praise of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.

So let us as believers in Christ and as a Body of believers united in Him set out to do just that. So that all with whom we come into contact will see just how excited we are, and sense how blessed we feel to be God's people.

And will in some way small or great come to understand through our words and our lives how magnificent our God truly is, and how much He means to us.

