

His People and Their God

Part 1:

Ye Shall Be My People

Ruth 1:14-18

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

- A. This morning I am beginning a 2 part series comprised of today's message and the one I hope to deliver next week. And for the overall series I've chosen the title, "His People and Their God." So let me begin with an introduction to the series before we delve into this, the 1st of 2 messages on this subject – His People and Their God.
- B. Some of you will recall that my last message was taken from Ezekiel chapter 36. And there, in the latter part of verse 28, we read these words spoken by God through the Prophet Ezekiel as He said, "...***and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.***" And while that wasn't the primary focus of that sermon, as I studied and came across those words, I was reminded of its similarity to the words Ruth spoke to her mother-in-law, Naomi. That passage in Ruth chapter 1 may be familiar to you if for no other reason than it is frequently quoted in wedding ceremonies. In Ruth 1:16 we read of Ruth speaking to her mother-in-law as part of that verse reads, "...***for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge:...***" And as she continues we see these words which bear a similarity to that phrase in Ezekiel 36 as she adds, "...***thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:***" And while today we will be examining quite a few scripture passages, I selected Ruth, chapter 1, verses 14-18 as my primary text.
- C. In Ezekiel 36 (as in many other places in the Bible) we have God's unconditional declaration to some that they shall be His people and that He will be their God. And I found it not only interesting, but useful to our understanding to see how Ruth, as one among those God has declared will be His, voices her resolution to Naomi, one of God's people, that Naomi's people (these people who belong to God) would be her people (that she would be one with them) and that Naomi's God would be her God. And I hope to show you in this 2 part series how these two truths cannot be separated. That is, (1) all of God's people, His elect or chosen people, will be His (a people purchased by the blood of Christ) and therefore, without fail (2) they will all come to know Him as their God – they will be saved!

D. In preparing these messages, I decided to search the Bible to find where all the phrase “be my people” could be found. I wanted to study this often repeated declaration by God in the various contexts in which it appears. And that search revealed that there were 16 different places where this phrase or some slight variation of it was found – that is, the phrase, “Ye shall be my people and I will be your God.” And by checking some of the cross references on those 16 verses, I found additional passages where the same idea was communicated. So we are going to examine this declaration in some of these various contexts in which it is found. And by doing so, I hope to heighten our understanding and appreciation for this simple but wonderful truth – that God has a people of whom it can be said that they (everyone of them and only them) – that they have Him, the one true God, as their God and Savior.

E. First, know that most of these passages are found in the Old Testament and as our recent study in Ezekiel revealed, often when God refers to “His people” it concerns His chosen nation, Israel, a people chosen under the Old Covenant – that covenant which was abolished by way of Christ, the promised Messiah, having fulfilled all its terms – the very Christ that was pictured or typified by that ceremonial law itself. And yet in some these Old Testament passages where this phrase is found it is abundantly clear that God is speaking of a chosen people unto eternal salvation – called spiritual Israel (God’s elect) as they are typified by the nation Israel. And as you may recall from our study in Ezekiel, sometimes both a temporal application to the nation Israel as well as an eternal application to spiritual Israel can be made.

II. Covenant Language: “You shall be my people.” Well in today’s segment, we will concentrate our attention on the first part of this phrase – God’s declaration to some that “You shall be my people.” For that reason I’ve titled today’s message, the first segment of this series, “Ye shall Be My People.” This is covenant language. And where it can be applied to a people chosen unto eternal salvation, spiritual Israel, it’s the language of what is referred to as the everlasting covenant of grace. And being a covenant of grace means that it is an unconditional covenant – unconditional towards those blessed therein.

III. We view a covenant as a formal binding agreement or compact made between parties. And indeed, this covenant refers to an agreed upon determination that cannot be broken because it has existed from all eternity and it is a covenant made between the eternal Godhead – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And the one triune God’s eternal will and purpose cannot and does not fail. Those blessed by that covenant are trophies of God’s grace, meaning they do absolutely nothing to earn or merit this blessing, to be found among this people that God has declared shall be His people!

A. Covenant of Grace: So first let's see in God's word how this eternal blessing of salvation is of grace, meaning it's a blessing not at all conditioned upon anything done by or in those saved thereby.

1. And as we begin, I'll remind you that in places where this declaration from God that "Ye shall be my people and I will be your God" is found, it is in reference to God's choosing of the nation Israel (as God determined and declared that they, that nation, shall be His people). But even in those places (such as Leviticus 26 and elsewhere) where God declared that they would be His people and would continue to be His people under that temporary and conditional covenant that He made with the nation Israel, in every instance we see that God's blessing upon them was solely owing to His own goodness, not any deservedness on their part. In fact it is abundantly clear that He kept them as His people in spite of themselves.

The point is, that even under the conditional covenant God made with Abraham and this nation to which the contexts of Leviticus 26 and similar passages pertain, we see that God's blessing upon national Israel was never due to their fitness for they broke that covenant. Their being blessed, a remnant of them being preserved to bring in the promised Messiah, was never conditioned on their obedience or else there would have been no remnant since their history is one of disobedience. Rather the favor God showed upon the nation Israel was solely due to God's own sovereign purpose and will in having determined and so declared that they would be His people.

There's a lesson there for us in that Israel's inability to keep God's law as given to Moses is a testimony to all of us that God's favor toward any of us is totally by grace. Recall that Paul told the Galatians in Galatians 3:24, "...***the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.***" And so as we see God's chosen people unto eternal salvation being typified by this nation, we see a picture of the truth of Ephesians 2:8 and 9, <Quote> "For by grace are you saved..." You and I as sinners cannot do anything to merit or earn favor before our Holy God! Salvation is not in any way or to any degree conditioned on those who are saved.

2. Jeremiah 31:31-34: First let's look at this phrase as found in Jeremiah chapter 31 and here we will see this same covenant language of grace in reference to spiritual Israel. Beginning in verse 31 we read, "***Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ³²Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt;*** That is – He now speaks of an entirely different covenant, unlike that temporal covenant I just mentioned.

And He continues saying... *which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:* ³³ *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel;* <And from the description that follows we know He now is referring to spiritual Israel as He says...> *After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.* ³⁴ *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

This speaks of those forgiven in Christ by virtue of His blood payment (His death) due unto their sins whereby God’s justice is satisfied and they are forgiven. God says of these forgiven, eternally saved sinners, using the unconditional language of the everlasting covenant of grace that they shall be His people. And this covenant cannot be broken because it was conditioned on God – God the Son who cannot and did not fail. The Lord Jesus Christ has already fulfilled its conditions perfectly and completely by His finished work of obedience unto death on the cross as a Substitute and Representative for these, His people.

It’s called a covenant of grace because the salvation promised therein is unearned and unmerited by those blessed in that covenant (His people). But never forget that this great blessing of eternal salvation was earned and merited – just not by the sinners saved therein. But oh did it take some doing. The salvation of His people took no less than the doing and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, in perfect satisfaction to the justice of God! He earned or merited the salvation of God’s people for them.

3. Jeremiah 32:38-40: Now we further see how this language refers to the everlasting covenant of grace if we look over in the next chapter of Jeremiah, chapter 32 where we read beginning in verse 38: *“And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:* ³⁹ *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:* ⁴⁰ *And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”* This is the covenant language of grace. There are no conditions whatsoever required of these whom God saves. God, who has said of Himself that He declares the end from the beginning, says here again and again, “I will, I will, and they shall.” God does not promise salvation here by saying, “If you will....”

If salvation is conditioned in any way or to any degree on you (your decision, your exercise of faith, your willingness to receive that which others would not), then know this – that would not be salvation by grace and it would be contrary to this covenant language of grace. In fact, that would describe another people – not these which our Sovereign God declares shall be His people.

- B. Covenant of Peace: Having seen in the first part of God’s declaration that “You shall be my people,” how this speaks of a covenant of grace, I now want us to see how it also is described in God’s word as a Covenant of Peace. We see that in the language of Ezekiel 37, beginning in verse 26 where we read, ***“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. ²⁷My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”***

So we see that the everlasting covenant of grace is also referred to as a covenant of peace. This should direct our thoughts toward the reconciliation made by Christ whereby peace is made between these elect or chosen, ungodly sinners and a holy God. What good news to be found among His people for He has made a covenant of peace with them – with a bunch of sinners who by nature come into this world at enmity (as enemies) with God in their own minds. Peace must be made and has been made for them by the Prince of Peace. And it is an everlasting peace!

- C. A People of Inheritance: And then finally as we consider God’s declaration “Ye shall be my people,” we see that these people are a people of inheritance.

1. In Deuteronomy 4, Moses is speaking to the nation Israel about crossing over into the promised land and to this people whom God had declared, “You shall be my people” Moses said in verse 20, ***“But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.”*** The people that belong to God (whether speaking of the nation Israel or those chosen unto eternal salvation) – they are a people of inheritance. And that too is the language of grace. Just as this nation did not deserve, earn or merit the Promised Land which God gave them, neither do any of spiritual Israel deserve, earn, or merit eternal deliverance into heaven’s glory.
2. Ephesians 1:11: Typically, an inheritance is earned by another, not by the heir. An inheritance is gained upon the death of another, consistent with the wishes of the dying party. And here we speak of none other than the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the cross on the behalf of those given to Him by God the Father.

Paul wrote to believers in that great passage in Ephesians 1, saying in verse 11, ***“In whom <speaking of Christ>also we have obtained an inheritance, <how so?> being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”*** Do you hear that language? God’s people obtain an inheritance due unto their being predestinated according to God’s own purpose and will. God has determined and declared they shall be His people!

3. Ephesians 1:17-18: And if we look just a bit further down in Ephesians 1 we see that all these who shall (without fail) be God’s people, who have an inheritance shall come to know it. Beginning there in verse 17 we read of Paul’s prayer for them, ***“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”*** And that makes for a good segue from which to introduce that which I intend to focus on next week.

IV. The one true and living God shall be **their** God:

Specifically we will consider how the one true God who has determined to have a people in that everlasting covenant of grace and peace – a people of inheritance – that same God shall just as surely, in each successive generation, be known by them. These are the 2 inseparable truths I mentioned at the onset. Not only does God declare that they shall be His people, but He also says of these who were chosen in Christ from all eternity, that He shall (without fail) be **their** God! This speaks of the sure results of God’s purpose to save them. They shall be born again, made spiritually alive so as to have the eyes of their understanding enlightened whereby they come to know Him whom to know is life eternal!

V. Closing:

Well, in the words of Ruth with which I began this message, we see the resolve of God-given faith that gives evidence that she is among those to whom God has declared “Ye shall be my people.” All of God’s chosen people shall (without exception) come to the Lord Jesus Christ and look to Him for all of their salvation. And our sovereign God ***“who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will”*** (Eph. 1:11) not only declares the end of all things but He has ordained the means to those ends as well. As Paul said in Romans 1, the Gospel that sets forth how God saves sinners, the good news wherein His righteousness is revealed – it is the power of God unto salvation. God uses the means of the preaching of this very Gospel of God’s grace to save His people. And it is a word of regeneration when so applied by God the Holy Spirit – the good news through which He brings His people to know Him whom to know is life eternal. In the story of Ruth we have evidence that Naomi had shared the Gospel of God’s grace with her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

Reflect again on the similar ring that Ruth's words had to God's words when she said to Naomi, "...*thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*" You can read of the context in which these words were spoken in the first chapter of Ruth. There we're told about this family from the chosen nation Israel leaving Bethlehem due to a famine in the land of Judah at that time. After leaving Bethlehem, they settled in the idolatrous country of Moab. This family consisted of a Naomi and her husband along with their two sons. At some point after arriving there, we learn that Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died. And then we're told that Naomi's 2 sons each married a woman from among the Moabites. One was named Orpah and the other Ruth. And it says that they lived there about 10 years when tragedy again struck their family as it's recorded that both of Naomi's sons died. Now this left Naomi without any immediate family there in Moab and left her 2 daughter-in-laws, Orpah and Ruth, as widows.

As the story progresses, I want to point out that despite her initial guidance to them, it seems that Naomi did desire that both Orpah and Ruth would turn from the false gods of their homeland to the one true God of Israel – her God. But initially after the death of her sons, Naomi told her two daughters-in-laws to return to their mother's house and remain in their home country of Moab while she planned to return to her homeland of Israel. Well, both Orpah and Ruth initially protested, indicating their desire to return with Naomi to her people and live among God's chosen people, the nation Israel. But Naomi, in her concern for their future well-being as widows, persisted in telling them to remain, apparently out of consideration for the probability of a better future in this life (perhaps thinking of their opportunity to remarry).

Well beginning in verse 14 of the 1st chapter of Ruth we read, "***And they*** <the 2 daughter-in-laws> ***lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.*** ¹⁵***And she*** <that is, Naomi> ***said,*** <to Ruth> ***Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.*** <While Naomi had already been suggesting that her daughters-in-law remain in Moab, notice here that she now mentions to Ruth the gods to which Orpah was returning in having decided to stay. I believe this is reflective of Naomi's desire for her eternal well being – her desire that Ruth actually follow her God – the true God of Israel> ¹⁶***And Ruth said,*** <to Naomi> ***Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:*** ¹⁷***Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.*** ¹⁸***When she*** <Naomi> ***saw that she*** <Ruth> ***was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.***" That is, she considered the matter settled.

Notice here the determined resolve in the words of Ruth. No doubt Naomi had acquainted her with the God of Israel, but obviously a higher power had now influenced her. A heart work had taken place as indicated by her firm resolve and attachment to Naomi, to her people, and to her God. Unlike Orpah, she didn't depart with a kiss, but clave or clung to her. And Naomi, seeing Ruth's unwavering determination to go with her to be with her people and her God, considered the matter now settled.

God has said of a people, that they shall be His and that He shall be their God. As we will examine further next week in the second segment of this series, to have the one true God as your God is to know Him as He is revealed in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ – in God's one way of salvation by Him as set forth in God's Gospel wherein the righteousness of God in Christ is revealed. Those whom God saves are brought to see that what they thought before (when they imagined they could do something to save themselves) will not cut it before a holy God. They come to see their need of a perfect righteousness that they, as sinners, have no possibility of producing. Sinners need the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ whether they are blessed to perceive that need or not. If we're to be accepted before God the Father, we must be made one with God the Son in the eyes of God's justice so as to have the merit of His finished work accounted unto us. Like Ruth, we change gods.

And given Ruth's determination to embrace Naomi's God as her own, it is reasonable to conclude that Naomi had been given spiritual life and faith to see her need for that which only the promised Messiah could and would merit for her – seeing the necessity that His righteousness be imputed or accounted unto her. That is what all of God's elect inevitably come to see by God-given faith. So, in turn, when Ruth says to Naomi, as one of God's eternally chosen people that, "Your God will be my God," is that not equivalent to a true believer's same attachment to (not only other like-minded believers, but also to) the Lord Jesus Christ Himself? It's akin to saying where Jesus goeth I would go.

You see, when He went to the cross and died, I died. Not personally. I wasn't born yet – but I died nonetheless in my Substitute and Representative for it was my sins for which He died. And when He arose from the dead so did I. Not personally, I wasn't born yet, but I arose in my Representative and Substitute, having accounted unto me the very merits of His obedience unto death (His righteousness) rendered in perfect fulfillment to the law and justice of God – a perfect, everlasting righteousness that demanded He live and so demands that I too shall live – and that forevermore. And the very fact that I have arisen from my spiritual death in the new birth so as to "clave" or cling to Him for all of my salvation bears witness of that. So where Jesus lodgeth I would lodge – for now, there in my Representative, and ultimately in my resurrected body for all eternity.

The people that belong to God in Christ, His people, shall all look to Christ alone for all of their salvation and thereby identify with their like-minded kin folks – their brothers and sisters in Christ. God the Son's Father is their God and my God and their Father and my Father – all due to our common union with Christ, standing accepted before God in Him, having His very righteousness as our own.

Is the steadfast resolve of your heart such that you could truthfully say unto others who believe this Gospel that you've heard preached today, "Your people shall be my people and your God my God"? Again, given that the Gospel of God's grace sets forth the necessity of God making us one with Christ so as to be accepted before the Father in Him, based upon His righteousness having been imputed or accounted unto us; then to so identify with other true believers is to identify with Christ – akin to saying unto Christ Himself that His people shall be your people and His Father, God the Father, shall be your God.

If that reflects the resolution of your heart, then rejoice for this only describes those whom God had drawn unto Himself by the power of His irresistible grace through the means of His Gospel of grace having been preached, heard and believed upon. And all who truly believe God's gospel have the evidence thereby to say with assurance, "Why, He had been talking to me all along when He said, "You shall be my people and I will be your God!" I pray that He is yours, for such are His!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.