

July 26, 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pure and acceptable in Your sight; oh Lord our God, Amen. In my last two sermons; the one right before I went on vacation, and that one I gave last week Sunday, I spoke of two sides. This is not a political sermon and I'm not talking Republicans or Democrats. Not at all, this is a very spiritual sermon. What are the two sides? Back on June 21st, we talked about how Peter calls us Christians. We are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood. God has chosen us, He has set us apart as a nation, His people. And this is a nation, a royal priesthood. We are all priests within God's Kingdom and royal because we are His children. We have been redeemed by Him we are part of His family. He is the King of kings; therefore, we are royalty. We are called to His priesthood.

What is the mark of the priesthood? It was the priests who had the job to preserve and preach the knowledge of God's Word. Secondly it was the priest who were to make intercession for those who needed to get right with God. Third, it was the priest who by example, were to lead in worship, in prayer, and in righteous living. Ultimately through all of these actions, it was the job of the priest to bring people to God, or to keep the people of God in His family.

Then last week, July 19 we heard the opposite part. Part of the sermon was Satan 101, a class on Satan. We heard how Satan is a fallen Angel. The Bible describes him as being beautiful, as being powerful, as being proud, as being crafty, as being cunning, and he uses all those attributes to do his work. What is his work? Well it certainly isn't to preserve knowledge and keep God's Word. No, his work is to lead people astray. He does this by getting to know us very well, to know our own weaknesses and then tempting us to sin within those weaknesses. He does this by bringing things around that we might love, like money, more than God and give us to begin to worship those things. He will use religious leaders to send us down the wrong path, thinking that we're following the right path. He does this ultimately by withholding the truth and promulgating lies. In fact, the Bible tells us that when he speaks, he lies because it's his native language. Ultimately, what you have is; Satan wants to destroy all that God loves.

Our call is to be that Royal priesthood. And as Peter said; and we heard last week's sermon we are to resist him; his temptations, his lies, all of that. We are to resist him standing firm in the faith. When this happens, Satan becomes that roaring lion seeking someone to devour. But he's roaring because when he sees us, he knows we have God's word. We know God Word. We believe God Word. We are off the table; he can't get us. He is roaring because he's hungry, he can't get what he wants, which leads to frustration, which makes him roar even louder.

Now when you look at those two sides, a holy nation, a royal priesthood; Satan 101, he wants to destroy; you might say 'I don't like this, the implications are lousy. It means I've got a target on my back. Satan is after me.' And I hate to tell you this but you're wrong. And yet, you are right. You see you're right because, yes Satan, it's like he's a sniper. He's got he's got it zeroed in on you. You are in the crosshairs of Satan. But you also in the crosshairs of God, you're on His bullseye.

Now let me expand. Satan desperately wants to stop that royal priesthood from preserving the knowledge of God and preaching God's Word. He wants to stop it. God has His bullseye on you. You are marked and you are marked to be the royal priesthood. And this concept of marking is unique. It literally relates to the name of the church Zion. In scripture Zion is used as a name synonymous with Jerusalem. Jerusalem was on a hill. Zion was also known as the City on the hill, the fortress on the hill. Zion is also used synonymously with God's people. But what does that word Zion literally mean? Zion literally translated in Hebrew means marking, or indication or identification. It relates to Jewish Law. Jewish Law says that if someone finds an object that has an identifying mark on it, we might call like a serial number nowadays. If the owner shows up and has the identifier; the person who found the object must give it back to them because they can prove it was theirs. It's kind of like, if I walked out into the parking lot and I said hey that's my truck over there. Someone might say, 'really, how can I prove that that's my truck?' You might say, show them your license. Well, yeah, but you know you could fake those. What would really identify it? The key. This has markings on it. Put it in the ignition, turn it, it starts. If I can go into the car, let me put the key, I can the walk over it here let me put it this in the ignition turned it on it runs. Do you have any questions now about whether it's my truck or not? You see it's the markings on that key, that make the key work because it fits perfectly with the truck. That's what the word Zion means. We are marked. We are engraved by God and that engraving shows that we fit perfectly with God.

In the Old Testament times the Israelites were called to be God's people through Abraham. And they were called Zion. Why? Because God had called them to be marked. They were marked in a number of ways. First, they were marked by His call for them to study His word. They were marked by His call to them to keep His commandments. As they kept those commandments, that caused them literally, physically, to be more through circumcision which set them apart from all the other societies. At the same time, that call to study His Word and to follow His commandments, made them totally different. It marked them spiritually; set them apart from all the other groups. All the other groups were polytheistic. They had polytheistic rituals that were designed to earn their way to earning salvation or oneness with the gods. But the Hebrew people, God's people, Zion were marked. They believed in one God the creator of the universe, and Salvation was through the action of that God not us. He would send a Messiah to save them and so they were saved by God's action and they were saved by faith through God's grace. Now New Testament thought is very simple. God calls us through the Gospel, not through Abraham, but just as they were to study God's Word, follow His commandments, we are not to just study God's Word. We are to, looking at 2 Timothy 4:2, we are to preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season.

And how does Paul define to Timothy, this young pastor what preaching the word means? When he says the first thing is to, and I quote "reprove" which means correct direction. If someone starts going the wrong way, you were to come along side and say, "hey, hey, no you don't want to make this turn, come on back, you don't want to go down this road. Come on back, let's go this way." But if they don't listen to you and say, 'Oh your full of it. This way looks a lot more fun over here.' Then you are to, and I quote, "rebuke" which is to condemn the wrong direction. "You don't want to go that way, that is going against the way of God." But then we

also hear Paul saying to exhort; which is basically commend the right direction. So, if someone comes to that spiritual fork in the road, and they start going the right direction, you come alongside and say, "bless you, well done good and faithful servant." How are we to use these different ways of sharing God's word; the rebuking, the reprovingly, the exhorting? We are to do this with complete patience and teaching. Patiently teaching God's Word. Now what is the right direction? Well again we are called through the Gospel which calls us to follow the promise. To follow what He taught, to follow in His footsteps. Since we are called through the Gospel, we know this through the study of God's Word. And we also know that it calls us then, gives us purpose by telling us to go and make disciples of all nations. But does it matter, absolutely. When we look at Colossians 2:11-12 or Romans 6:4-6, we see Paul comparing our baptism to the circumcision of the Old Testament. We are physically marked in our baptism as being God's. Being Zion, we are identified through our baptism. And at the same time, our lives or supposed to be an identifier to mark us.

In Matthew 7:15 – 20, Jesus talks about us, His people, bearing fruit. One of the fruits from there is found in our Gospel this morning, where we hear all of those parables. Those parables boil down to two distinct truths. The parable about the mustard seed, the parable about the seed in the good soil, and the other soils, the parable about the leaven is about faith. It is faith that grows like the mustard seed. It is faith that grows in good soil. It is faith like the leaven moves through our lives and goes out to others. But then the second set of parables about the man who founded a hidden treasure in a field, sold everything so we could buy their hidden treasure; or the jeweler who was looking for a pearl, the perfect pearl, he sells everything and he buys that perfect pearl; is about our attitude with that faith. When we hear that Gospel message, it is the most important thing in the world to us and we let everything else go. Because that is our focus. We are saved by Jesus Christ.

That then leads us to John 13 verse 35. Jesus loved us so much that He died for us. in And Jesus says; "they will know you by your love." We are to love as Jesus loves. When we love, we bear fruit. We are the baptized children of God. We are marked. We are sons. We can take great comfort in that. Psalm 125:1-2 says "Those who trust in the Lord are like mountain Zion which cannot be moved but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever more." Mount Zion, that a hilltop fortress. Jerusalem, the city of David. It was surrounded by other mountains all around it and mountains in the Bible represent strength. They represent immovable objects. And the Bible is telling us that God is the mountains around this spiritual Zion. This is why Saint Paul writes in Romans 8:31, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Satan can. But there's this problem for Satan. On a hill outside of Zion, outside of Jerusalem, God gave His Son up for us.

And that's why we read in Psalm 2:6 "I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill." There Christ was crowned, not with glory, with a crown of thorns. There Christ was lifted up; not on the shoulders of His soldiers, but on a cross. There Christ suffered to die and pay the price of our sin. It is from that cross that Christ was taken down and was literally buried in the hill. But the will of God surrounded Christ and He rose from the dead! He redeemed us from our sins! He

made us His own! He has marked us! He sits on the throne of our hearts! He surrounds us forever!

So, going back to the beginning, who wins? Royal priesthood or Satan? We do, as we are Zion! We are marked by God, called by God, and Christ's victory over Satan is our victory. And so, as we come to the end of this sermon, we should be jumping for joy and saying, 'I am Zion, I am marked by God! I am the Royal priesthood! Through Christ, I am already victorious! I am redeemed. I am taking my first breaths of eternal life. I am marked by God through my baptism marked by God through my faith and by my life.' And in a time of darkness in this country, in this state, in this city; I think that light, that joy that we have, needs to be shared with those around us, so that they can find the joy, the happiness, the peace, the smile that we can have in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of presidential election year, in the middle of all sorts of catastrophic stuff going on in this life, because we know our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.