

TRINITY BIBLE CHURCH
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE PEOPLE OF GOD!
“PEOPLE OF PROFOUND PRIVILEGE AND PURPOSE”
1 Peter 2: 9-12

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As some of you know, my wife, Sherry, and I were born into Jewish families. Even though neither one of us, particularly me, truly followed the faith, nonetheless, we were Jews. That was our label and our identity. And some, who called us Jews, did so in respect. Sherry was that “sweet little Jewish girl”, but others; in disrespect and hatred, as some called me, “Roy, the Jew boy.” Remember that anti-Semitism (the hatred of Jews) was very prevalent in the 40’s, 50’s and 60’s.

Twenty-eight years ago, Sherry invited Jesus to be her Lord and master and received God’s free gift of salvation. She recalled to me that on that same day, all of a sudden, she realized that her label and identity changed — she was now a Christian — and no longer a Jew! She was no longer a “nice Jewish girl”, she was a “Christian”, a “gentile”, a “shikse”, in the Jewish vernacular — and I am a shagetz.

As Jews, we were also called and labeled, “the Chosen People”. Moses says in Deuteronomy 7:6; “For you (the Israelites) are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”

But just what does that mean? It is even more confusing because, as we will read in tonight’s scripture, the Apostle Peter, in his first letter, calls believers the “Chosen People”.

But wait! How can both of us be the “Chosen People”?

Well, I will try to explain this a bit later. But for now, please join me in reading our verses for today from 1 Peter 2:9-12:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies’ of Him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Keep your behavior excellent among the gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

The NIV says “You are a chosen people” and the NKJV renders this as “You are a chosen generation”. The “day of visitation” is also rendered as the “day of judgment.”

Paul also calls believers, “the Chosen People” as he writes in Colossians 3:12; “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Knowing and remembering who we are is vital to lead the life that Christ wants for us. When we forget who we are, we will not be who we were meant to be.

Within most of us today there is a longing, a deep desire for significance. To be part of something far greater than ourselves — something that makes a difference — something that gives life purpose and meaning. That is because that is how God wired us!

Unfortunately, many of us are stuck in life; discouraged and even depressed.

Why? Because we have forgotten who we are and have followed the cultural clues to pursue personal pleasure and happiness as goals unto themselves, which never satisfy for the long term. We’ve lost our memory of the significance God intended for us as his people.

Even churches with good years of serving Christ and mature believers, sometimes have troubles and they forget just who they are! Brothers, we desperately need to get our memories back!

So I come to you with a sense of eager anticipation for the days ahead, because of who we are. I want to confirm to you who know, and to awaken in you, the excitement of what it means to be who we are, the “Chosen People of God.” Amen?

When some Christians learn that I have a Jewish heritage and background, they will often say, “Wow, you are one of the chosen people!” My immediate response is “chosen for what”? After all, if one is chosen, they must be chosen for some task or purpose!

While we can differ in our thoughts regarding the role of the Jewish people in the past, present and future, I believe that we all can agree that God gave the Jewish people, the responsibility to bear the seed of salvation, according to The covenants beginning with Abraham and concluding with the foretold birth of the Meshach, the Messiah, the Christ, our Savior — Jesus. Amen?

But, according to Peter, we, as believers, have also been chosen, but again, chosen for what task or purpose?

Once again, we can differ on just how the Lord, makes this happen, but we can all come together with the knowledge that we, as believers, have been chosen to spend our eternity with him and not separated from him. Listen to the great and familiar words of Jim Hill:

**“What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,
And I look upon his face,
The one who saved me by His grace!
What a glorious day that will be!”**

You know that God’s word gives us a much higher view of ourselves as the people of God, than we normally have. This letter from Peter shouts to us that we are people of extraordinary privilege and purpose, each of us is part of something far greater than ourselves.

In the NT, the word church is the Greek word ekklesia, which means “people specially called out for a specific purpose.” We are not just any company of called-out people, but one’s Jesus distinctively calls, “my church.”

Thus the second reason that Peter calls us the “Chosen People” is to identify us, collectively, as his family — his church — with the specific tasks and responsibilities to declare his excellence’s through our words and actions; to be his light in this world and to share the gospel with those who have not been set free from the evil one.

Jesus anticipated that people would respond to his invitation, to put their faith in him, for pardon and forgiveness of sin, be set right with him and to follow hard after him.

In Matthew 5: 14, Jesus says of us, “You are the light of the world” — you are the new custodians of my kingdom. Through you I will carry out my kingdom mission to seek and save the lost. As my Father sent me, Jesus says, I now send you.

Dear people of this mission, part and parcel of our becoming Christians is that Christ calls us into a “family of families”, a household of faith, a local mission and a local church.

Speaking of “family of families”, it goes beyond my wildest thoughts to think that when we are in glory, not only will we be with our present day “family of families”, but with every “family” that has gone before us.

And if we leave this earth before our Lord returns, eventually, we will also commune with those that will come after us! Can you possibly imagine just how great that will be? Doesn't that just overwhelm you?

We are gathered and organized to love and serve God and one another, and to reach out to our world with the love of Christ.

Because Peter understood this to be true, he presents meaningful metaphors to describe our privilege and our purpose. These are recorded here, no longer for the Christians to whom this was originally written. They took their turn, and you have to agree that they did pretty well. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't be having this discussion. But they have gone to be with the Lord. The things written here are now for us who have succeeded them. This wonderful description of who we are as the church, the people of God, is for us today who live and breathe and hope in Christ.

We, as Christians are people of privilege! Peter writes in verse 9a; "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God".

Talk about status symbols! Look at the privileged position we enjoy as Christians, who are part of the people of God.

These are not descriptions of just individuals, but of who we are together as the people of God. Let's look more closely at this verse!

First, "we are a chosen race". The first two words of verse 9 are "but you", words signaling a sharp contrast to the disobedient people described in verses 7 and 8, as those who have stumbled over the truth and rejected Christ.

As Christians, we are not a random race of people formed by some fluke. We have been specially selected by the undeserved favor of God—God's grace.

Today, we live in a world of elevated ethnic pride — Native Americans, African Americans, Scandinavian Americans, Polish Americans, etc. The church of Jesus Christ is a much nobler race than any other. We are "God's chosen people."

We were born of Adam, but through Christ, we have become privileged members of a divinely chosen race, the church, and the people of God. We are a chosen generation.

Secondly, we are a "royal priesthood". This is not your common clergy. Every Christian is a noble priest—a minister in Christ's church. We are "royal priests" because we serve the king of Kings and Lord of Lords!

We have equal access to the presence of God and equal responsibility for carrying out the mission of Christ. The church is like a great ship where everyone on board is part of the staff, the working crew. There is no passenger list.

Together, as royal priests, we serve the living God and one another, mediating God's grace to spiritually desperate people around us. We are a "royal priesthood."

Thirdly, we are a "holy nation".

We are not your normal nation, but, "holy", which means set apart as special to God, especially for God, loved intensely by God. And as the people of God, we have been consecrated for citizenship and residence in his kingdom.

We live under the banner and loving rule of our heavenly king. We are privileged beyond measure or description. That is why Peter adds this most precious description of all — "we are a people for God's own possession." Imagine the value and self-worth we feel knowing that God wants us for his own.

Peter continues in verse 10 saying, "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."

Most often, the value of something is determined by what someone is willing to pay for it. Look at the value God put on you and me. 1 Peter 1: and verses 18 and 19 says; "for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

God didn't spend dollars to redeem us for his own. He purchased us with the precious, priceless lifeblood of his own dear son. I humbly stand with you this day at the foot of that old rugged cross and say, "Oh God, how very deeply privileged we are. We are a people for your own possession. Amen!

Now, take a deep breath and get ready, because, in the second half of verse 9, the Apostle Peter says that these privileges that we enjoy as Christ's church are for a very specific and most profound purpose. You're going to find real pleasure, satisfaction, fulfillment and significance, all as a result of engaging in God's purpose for you, as his people.

Verse 9b states; "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." In a sentence, this is our label and our identity, which leads to our destiny — we are a people of purpose

The first word of verse 9b, is “that” or “so that”, or “in order that” which come from the Greek word, hina, which signals that what follows is the reason or purpose for what came before.

This is God’s word to you and me.

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, in order that (here comes our purpose) you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light....”

Some versions read “that you may show forth the praises of him....” The verb has a two-dimensional meaning — it means both tell and show forth, so that people can both hear about and see the excellencies of our God from us and in us. Here is our life-directing purpose as Christians. God has chosen, and redeemed us and called us together as a church to show and tell his excellencies — his excellent personal qualities — in our lives and from our lives as a community of believers.

Think about what God is like — his expansive, inclusive, unconditional love; — His faithfulness, integrity, truthfulness, justice, compassion, purity, holiness and mercy — His forgiveness; His joy, His peace, His kindness, His gentleness, patience and goodness — and His power, His light, His radiance, His servanthood and his gospel!

All these and more are his excellencies. And guess what?

God has decided that you and I should have the privilege of showing and proclaiming these excellencies in our world, among the people with whom we rub shoulders every day.

In the middle of Jesus’ heart, at the very center of Christ’s mission plan and strategy, is us, his church. The church is near and dear to the heart of God. It is comprised of us Christians; people called out by God and set apart for this purpose. Peter had in mind God’s words in Isaiah 43: 21, “the people whom I have formed for myself will declare my praises—my excellencies.”

It is God’s desire and intention that the beauty and benefits of his life, his character and his love would be as evident in us as his church, that through us others might hear, see and benefit. God is telling us that the reason he formed us as his people and called us together into this community of faith is that we may and can show and tell others, the reality of Christ.

He says that the reason our Father sacrificed his son to redeem us from our sin and its consequences is that we, the church, can be a living display case of his holiness, his grace and his love!

There is both dignity and privilege in this high calling, not to mention what we are doing for other people, when we show and tell to them the reality of God's life and love in our own words and ways, with our lips and with our lives.

God tells us that when we are born again by faith in Christ, we become God's children and are joined together as a family of families. There is a spiritually genetic connection and we have a new label and a new identity.

We begin to look like our heavenly Father in our attitudes and actions. He begins to restore his image in us so that the excellencies of his character and the good news of His grace to us in Christ actually show forth and sound forth from us.

Remember this, my brothers — the world around us gets its picture of God most of all from the people who say they are the family of God — us, the church. They read us more than they read the bible.

They hear about Jesus, but they see us, his church, we who have been called out of darkness, into his marvelous light.

How we live as the community of faith and how important this family of families is to each of us, says something about our connection to Christ and our commitment to each other.

Jesus said that there are three things that will distinguish his people from the rest of the world; — our uncommon love for each other — our unique unity, even in great diversity, — and our deeds of goodness to others!

The way we are to declare the excellencies of God, is to act them out.

When you and I act out the excellencies of God, people hear what we tell them about Jesus with even greater eagerness. God made us who we are to show the world who he is.

That is what it means to be the people of God, "a chosen race!"

So what does this all mean?

As the people of God, we must walk the talk. A Pastor in Chicago tells of the old southern preacher who said, “Be who you is, because if you ain’t who you is, then you is who you ain’t.”

That is why Peter is concerned that this extraordinary purpose we have as God’s people will translate into our lifestyle and behavior right now, in this lifetime.

So he writes this in verses 11 and 12; “beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

We have been called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. Yet, we live in a world that is still in the darkness. That is obvious by the eroding values and behavior we see.

In order to show forth or proclaim God’s excellencies in an unclouded, uncompromised way, we Christians need to live in this world as aliens and strangers! We are to reside, but not belong.

We are to pass through as temporary residents, but not settle in or become too attached and certainly not adopting the temporal and empty values of the secular culture around us.

Our citizenship is elsewhere. When you and I remember and realize who we are as God’s people, and allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by that privilege, we are in a place to be overtaken by God. And when God does a complete takeover, he does a complete makeover! And we begin to shine.

We are the people of God and citizens of His heavenly kingdom. Let it show in us!

Abstain from the desires, appetites and ambitions that war against our souls — that compromise our devotion to the Lord and prevent us from showing and telling the reality of Christ to those around us.

When we fully embrace the church as a community of faith, called out by Christ, and when we love and serve one another and practice the unity of the spirit, it perplexes those who are not yet believers, but validates the reality of Christ and his life in us.

When the church exhibits moral purity and holds forth God’s values at work, at school, in the neighborhood, or wherever, we become the most powerful means God uses to convict others of their sin and obvious need of our savior, drawing them to Christ.

That is why unbelievers are always looking for opportunities to criticize or point out our failures as Christians.

Another old preacher used to say, “When God’s sheep are a dirty gray, the black sheep feel better.”

So Peter urges us, “don’t let that be true of you.” Rather, live in such a way that when Jesus returns in judgment (the day of visitation), many people will actually glorify God because they are ready for that day because of what they saw in you.

I wonder how many people will be celebrating and giving each other high fives at Christ’s return because they were pointed to Jesus and received him as savior because of our “showing and telling” of his excellencies?

How many people here and elsewhere will see such distinctiveness in us, such a display of what God is like, that we will have their full attention and openness to hear the gospel and receive Christ?

Listen to how Titus 2:11-14 puts it. “You and I are people of extraordinary purpose—to show and tell the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

I pray that God has spoken to you from this passage in a very special way today.

Dear friends, in the words of Mother Teresa, to you as the “chosen people of God” — “Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.” Yes, it’s more than you think, this, being the people of God.

Let’s go after it with all that is in us!

Let’s pray!