

A Holy Nation People

1 Peter 2:4-25
Key Verse: 2:9

by Sarah Barry

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Today we are going to study 1 Peter, chapter 2. In chapter 1 we learned that Peter wrote this letter to Christians scattered throughout the world by persecution. He calls them "God's elect, strangers in the world." They were rejected by the world, but chosen by God to be holy nation people. We are not scattered by persecution, but we live in a world of scattered people. We live in a multi-cultural, multi-language, multi-racial, multi-religion world. Many young people struggle to find their identity. Who am I? We identify ourselves by our ethnic background or by our profession or by our school or by our hometown. Gang members identify themselves by certain marks and tattoos. Second gens have a second gen identity. I hang on to my Southern accent. What is our true identity? We have an identity in God. This letter is written to all of us who believe in Jesus. We are God's elect. He chose us. He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We are his people, a holy nation people.

Today, we will study 1 Peter chapter 2 in three parts: Who is Jesus? Who are we? How should we live as a holy nation people?

I. Who is Jesus? (4-8)

Read verse 4. "As you come to him, the Living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--" Jesus is called the Living Stone. The Living Stone is the Risen Christ. God raised him from the dead. He is a life-giving Spirit (1Cor 15:47), for he gives life to all who come to him. He is chosen by God and precious to him. Here, Peter goes to the prophets of the Old Testament to show God's plan for world redemption through Jesus. He uses the analogy of the "Stone." Perhaps this is related to the fact that Jesus gave Peter the name "Rock" (Peter) the first time they met. (Jesus planted hope in his heart and gave him a new direction.) Peter teaches us that Jesus is not only the Living Stone, but also he is the Rejected Stone, the Cornerstone, the Capstone, and the Stumbling Stone.

A Holy Nation People

Jesus, the Rejected Stone, came into the world he had created. He was rejected and killed. In Mark 12, Jesus told the parable of the vineyard and tenants. The Owner, who represents God, planted a beautiful vineyard and rented it to tenants. When harvest time came, he sent his servants, then his Son to get some fruit. The tenants mistreated the servants and killed the Son and threw him out of the vineyard. Jesus concluded the parable with a quotation from Isaiah, which Peter also quotes in verse 7: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone/cornerstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes." Jesus, the Son of God, came to his world. The world was in rebellion against God. Jesus came to love and give. He is the climax of God's redemptive history. The builders, the religious and political establishment of his day, rejected him. He didn't fit their idea of the Messiah, so they rejected him. They killed him on a Roman cross.

But God chose him. God raised him from the dead. He became the precious cornerstone in God's house. The cornerstone is the foundation stone. The cornerstone determines the design and orientation of the building. It is the most important stone in the building. In God's house, only Jesus can be the Cornerstone (1Co 3:11). Jesus is both the Cornerstone and the Capstone. The Capstone is the climax of God's redemptive history. It is the final touch. It is the stone that holds the building together. Jesus is the Living Stone who gives life to the world. God raised him from the dead and made him the Cornerstone and Capstone of the spiritual house he was building.

Verse 8 says that Jesus is also the Stumbling Stone. Those who did not believe the message and disobeyed stumbled. They did not come to Jesus, the Living Stone, so they could not become living stones. Sometimes people don't want to come to Jesus because they do not want to repent. Some people don't like the way of the cross and seek to find another way to God. They are offended by Jesus, so they stumble over the Stumbling Stone. Let us come to the Living Stone and be made alive by his life-giving spirit.

II. Who are we? (5, 9-10)

We define ourselves by who we are or by what we do. Batman said, "It's not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me." This is not entirely true. Sometimes, who we are determines what we do. It is important to find our identity in this confused and confusing world. We are someone's son or daughter, or someone's parent. I am a doctor or a teacher or a student or fisherman or priest. Our identity may come from how others define us. But it is more important that it come from how we define ourselves. One of the growing crimes in America is

A Holy Nation People

called "identity theft." A thief may use our identity to steal money, or for some other nefarious purpose, but no one can actually steal our identity. The question, "Who am I?" is one that each of us must answer for oneself. Peter gives his answer with five points.

(1) Who are we? We are living stones. Verse 4 begins, "As you come to him..." We come to Jesus the living Stone so that we might have life. Each of us who comes to Jesus has a personal, life-giving relationship with the Living Stone, Jesus. We become, individually, a living stone. Together, we are living stones in the spiritual house which God is building. This spiritual house is God's church. Read verse 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." Every believer is a living stone in this house that God is building. It is composed of people from all kinds of human situations and backgrounds, people of every race and language. It is composed of tall people and short people, fat people and skinny people, rich people and poor people, dumb people and smart people. It is composed of strangers and aliens. Each one is a small living stone. Paul says, "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Bible) with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." (Eph 2:19-22) The cornerstone and capstone is Jesus and we are the living stones, a holy nation people.

(2) Who are we? We are a chosen people. "We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." (9) We are a chosen people. We did not volunteer. God chose us and brought us to himself. Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me. I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." (Jn 15:16) Moses knew how precious God's choosing was. He told the Israelites, "The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his treasured possession." (Dt 8) When he tells us that we are a chosen people he is saying to each of us: "Out of all the people in the world, I chose you. You belong to me. I chose you, not because you were strong, or smart or beautiful. Out of my grace and mercy I chose you. I chose you because you came to Jesus." (Jn 1:12-13) People wait to be chosen to enter medical school or law school. Girls (or boys) wait for someone to choose them to marry. Barak Obama was chosen to be President of the United States. But the Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth has chosen us to belong to him. How precious it is to be God's chosen people. You are precious. I am precious. God chose you. He chose me. Sometimes being chosen seems to make life difficult.

A Holy Nation People

Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof" looked up to the heavens and asked God, "Why don't you choose someone else some time?" He did not know the Messiah, so he didn't really understand God's grace and love in his choosing. But God's choosing makes us great. God chose Mary to be the mother of the Messiah. He chose Abraham to be the father of many nations. To be chosen by God is to be loved by God. It gives us identity and purpose. A chosen people are a holy nation people.

(3) Who are we? We are a royal priesthood. God brought us to himself so that we might be a royal priesthood. Verse 5 says that we are a holy priesthood. What does it mean to be a priest? In the Old Testament, the high priest dressed in beautiful robes and wore a turban which said, "Holy to the Lord." He offered animal sacrifices to atone for sin. He went to pray at the altar of incense with the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on his breastpiece and on his shoulders. (Ex 39) This means that he prayed for the whole nation. All priests were supposed to be descendants of Aaron. But Jesus was not a descendant of Aaron. He was from the tribe of Judah. Jesus' priesthood was different. He was a Royal Priest. He was a priest like Melchizedek (Gen 14, Heb 7). Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, king of righteousness and king of peace, came with bread and wine to encourage Abraham after the battle of the kings. Hebrews says that he was "...without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever." (Heb 7:3) Like Melchizedek, Jesus became a priest on the "basis of the power of an indestructible life." (He 7:16) Jesus was a man of prayer. He prayed early in the morning. He prayed for his disciples. He prayed for his nation. He prayed for his enemies. From the cross, he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus chose us--all believers-- to be a royal priesthood. A priest is a mediator between God and mankind. The prayer topic Jesus taught us is: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." As royal priests, we must pray for the people of the world. We must pray for China and North Korea and the Muslim people. We must pray for the colleges and university students of the world. We must pray for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. As a royal priesthood, we must offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. What are these? Rom 12:1,2 says, "...to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God..." Paul saw preaching the gospel to unbelievers as a priestly duty. He offered the Gentile world to God as a sacrifice (Ro 15:16). A royal priesthood is a holy nation people.

(4) Who are we? We are a holy nation. This means that we are different from the world. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were different because God dwelt in his sanctuary, in their midst (Ex 25). We who belong to Jesus are set apart to be a holy nation. We cannot find our identity in the world. We belong to God. We are

A Holy Nation People

different because Jesus' blood makes us holy and his Holy Spirit indwells us. We are different from the people of the world because we have been changed on the inside by a new birth. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us we have an inner life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22,23). In Chapter 1, Peter says, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again..."(1:22-23a) Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn 13:35) Holy Nation People love each other.

(5) Who are we? We are a people belonging to God. Sometimes people think, "I don't want to belong to anyone. I am my own man." But this cannot be possible. If we do not belong to God, we belong to the devil. There is no middle ground. Once we were not a people; now we are God's people. Once we had not received mercy. Now we have received mercy. God redeemed us, not with silver or gold, but with the blood of Jesus, the Lamb without blemish. We belong to him. This is our true identity. There is a story about a little boy who made a boat. He whittled it out of wood, fitted it with a small sail and painted and polished it. He loved his little boat. One day, he went down to the river to play with his boat. A sudden gust of wind caught it's sail and it was swept out to sea. The little boy was sad and cried. He missed his little boat. But there was nothing to do about it. Then, one day he walked by a pawn shop and there in the window was his boat! Someone had found it and pawned it. The price marked on the boat was very high. But the little boy worked hard and earned money and one day, he had enough. He went to the pawn shop and bought his boat back. His heart was full of joy. He looked at his boat and said, "Little boat, you are twice mine. I made you and I bought you." God made us and he bought us. We belong to him.

Because we belong to God, we must know what God wants and live to please him. Verse 9 says that God chose us to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people who belong to him, so that we may declare the praises of God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. He chose us to declare his praises, to glorify his name. Once we lived in the darkness of sin and ignorance. We were dead in our sins and without hope in the world. We had no reason for living. We did not know who we were. God chose us. He called us out of darkness into his light for his own great purpose. Rick Warren wrote a popular book called, "The Purpose-Driven Life." This book was popular because it speaks to a fundamental need in our lives. People are created to live purposeful lives. When we study Genesis, we find that man is created for mission. If we have no purpose in life, we have no meaning. We cannot live without hope or meaning. There is a sequel called, "The Purpose-

A Holy Nation People

Driven Church." God has a purpose for his Church. It is important that the purpose that drives us and God's church be God's purpose, not a worldly purpose. The Crusades of the 12th century had a great misunderstanding of God's world mission purpose. If fulfilling our ambition for education or marriage or money is not for God's glory, it is not God's purpose. We can find our true identity as a Holy Nation People when we find God's purpose for ourselves and our church.

What is God's purpose? We must find God's purpose for ourselves and our church in the Bible. The Bible gives us the big picture: God wants to restore creation order, to bring all the world to repentance and faith. God wants all creation to worship him. God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Ti 2:4). He wants to put all his enemies under his feet and reign over all things (1Co 15:24-25). In such a world, all people will love and worship God and all people will love each other. Everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree. They will beat their swords into plowshares and learn of war no more. When Jesus comes again he will bring in his kingdom. His prayer, "Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," will be fulfilled.

The Bible tells us that our mission as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people belonging to God is to tell the good news of him who brought us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We can find our identity as a holy nation people when we seek to bring people to God. We must pray and act. We must witness to the unbelieving world by our words and actions and seek to engage in Bible study anyone who is willing. Read verse 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." We are a people belonging to God. We do not belong to the world. We may find identity in our profession or in our nationality or family, but our real identity is as a people chosen by God, a holy nation people. We declare the praises of him who brought us out of darkness into his wonderful light when we live holy lives as God's holy nation people.

III. How do we live as holy nation people? (11-24)

First, abstain from evil desires and live a good life - for the glory of God (11-12).

Verses 11-12 tell us that we should abstain from the evil desires that war against the soul and live such good lives that unbelievers may see our good deeds and glorify God. Mt 5:16 says, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

A Holy Nation People

Second, imitate Christ.

Jesus left us an example so that we might follow in his footsteps (21). In verses 13-23, Peter was not so much writing a rule book as describing Jesus. He is telling us to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. In these verses he points out 3 ways to imitate Christ:

(1) Submit to authority. Jesus was not rebellious. Jesus was not a slave of men. He was free, but he used his freedom to serve like a slave. Once he even washed his disciple's dirty feet. Jesus was free because he was absolutely obedient to God. We must have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. Jesus submitted to the rulers of his country, even though they were evil. He paid taxes. He respected the Roman officers. Jesus did not have a rebellious spirit. He submitted to God, so he was free. We must use our freedom to show proper respect to everyone, Love one another, fear God and honor the king.

(2) Bear up under unjust suffering. Jesus did not have a victim's mentality, even though he was a victim of evil men. God allows suffering to purify our faith. If we become bitter and crooked, then our love grows cold and our faith weak. To bear up under unjust suffering helps us understand Jesus who suffered for us. He was beaten and insulted, but he bore it for us.

(3) Don't retaliate. Jesus did not retaliate. He did not seek revenge. He trusted God, the wise and just judge. He was a good shepherd for his disciples and did his priestly duty. He prayed for them. He prayed from the cross for his enemies and for all sinners, including us, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Third, accept God's grace.

We can be a holy nation people when we accept God's grace. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

We must return every day to our Shepherd Jesus. He is the Overseer of our souls. Verse 25 says, "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Perhaps the aliens and strangers to whom Peter was writing were lonely and lost and had wandered away from Jesus. Now was the time to return to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls.

A Holy Nation People

In conclusion, Jesus, the Living Stone, is the cornerstone and capstone of the Holy Nation People. When we come to Jesus we are made alive. We are chosen as living stones. He says to us: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."