

YOU ARE A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

1 Peter 2:4-10

Key Verse: 1 Peter 2:9

“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.”

We have been studying about God’s Kingdom for our long-anticipated ISBC. Now it is only four days away. Are you excited to celebrate God’s kingdom with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Last week, we learned about who Jesus is: he is the gentle and righteous Savior King, who brings the kingdom into our lives through his sacrificial death. This morning, we want to meditate on who we are, personally and as a community. Knowing our identity is so important. We live according to who we think we are. Do you know who you are? What defines you? Is it your family, your job, or accomplishments?

Let’s carefully consider who we are. We have an incredible identity that comes from God, our Creator and Redeemer. Every single one of us is so important in this world. When we fully understand our identity in Jesus, we can live an extraordinary life. In his letter, Apostle Peter addresses Christians who were persecuted and living as exiles in this world. However, he calls them a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession. This reminds us of who we are as a community and personally. My prayer is that we may fully realize God’s amazing blessings placed in us and wholeheartedly respond to him.

I. The Living Stone and a Spiritual House

Look at verses 4-5. **“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—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.”**

Here, Jesus is called the living Stone and Christians are referred to as living stones. Can a stone be living? This seems a strange way to describe a stone, doesn’t it? But Peter is describing a metaphor that relates the living Stone to the house of God. Peter particularly loved this stone metaphor. In Mt 16:18, Jesus

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named him Peter, saying “You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.” In 1 Peter 2:4, Jesus is **“the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.”** Jesus first used this stone metaphor in his parable of the tenants (Mk 12:10; cf. Ps 118:22), referring to himself as the stone rejected by the builders but chosen by God. When Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom, he was rejected and persecuted by the religious leaders. Eventually, people crucified him. Yet God, the chief architect, chose this rejected stone and made him the cornerstone on which the whole building depends. God saw his obedient Son as infinitely precious and vindicated him by raising him from the dead. Jesus was lifted on high as the Author of salvation. Jesus is the living Stone, because he is the resurrected Lord, who gives eternal life.

This truth is significant for Christians who struggle in an unbelieving environment. Who wants to be rejected and ostracized in society? The bad news is that Christians are often rejected and not welcome in this world. But we have great news. What happens when we come to Jesus? Verse 5 says, **“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.” We become like living stones. That is, we live because we are united with Jesus who is the source of life. As we come to Jesus, we are being built into a spiritual house, the house of God.

What does it mean that we are being built into a spiritual house? Does this mean that we are being placed into the rigid, rectangular structure of a building? No. The church is not a static building or institution, but the people of God. The church is a spiritual community, founded upon Christ, the cornerstone. Verse 6 says that Jesus is **“a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame”** (6). A cornerstone is the foundation of a building. Every part is laid out according to its connection to the cornerstone. We may not have a magnificent temple building. But because we are connected to Jesus, the church is much more glorious than a temple that consists of dead stones. The physical temple in the Old Testament pointed towards the new temple. In the New Testament era, the Messiah Jesus has become the temple for us by his incarnation and sacrifice on the cross. In his grace, we are now together being built up into a spiritual house, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are the church where the glory of God resides.

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Since we are being built into a spiritual house, we are not isolated stones. Instead, we are interconnected with one another because we are united with Christ. This is the beauty of the church that shines in our individualistic culture. Often, Christianity is only seen as a personal matter between God and me. But this view of Christianity overlooks the importance of community that the Bible teaches. As a church, we are a countercultural movement. With Jesus, the cornerstone, we all organically belong together. Every member is precious. Each of us can properly function and fulfill our calling when we are connected to the people of God.

Because of Jesus, we are also a holy priesthood. We are not a passive building, but the active participants in worship. We worship God through Jesus Christ, who enabled us to come to God's presence by his own blood.

So, everything hinges upon Jesus, who is chosen and precious to God. Jesus is the precious cornerstone for those who trust in him. But he is a stumbling block for those who disobey the word (1Pe 2:8). How precious is Christ to you? Do you treasure him above all things? Do you constantly come to him?

As a member of the church universal we treasure Christ together. I'm thankful for our church that is built upon Jesus our Savior. This year, we have been diligently preparing for the upcoming ISBC. For the past three weeks, many of us around the world have devoted our hearts and time to the prayer meetings, sharing God's words and testimonies, praying together, serving delicious snacks, and preparing for various programs. These are more than activities. They are all acts of worship that treasure Christ. Though we are not perfect, we love each other because of Jesus. How beautiful is the church of God! We can have great expectations for the conference, as we worship God together. Amen!

II. The Identity of the Church

We live in a culture that takes offense at Jesus Christ. In this hostile environment, we may feel that we are strange and insignificant to the world. What does the word of God say about Christians?

Look at verse 9. **“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.”** This verse is given to the

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Christian church scattered around the world. It is the fulfillment of God's words in Ex 19:5-6 through Jesus Christ. Here, we are called by significant titles: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. These are the titles that the Old Testament Israel used to define itself. Now, Peter applies them to the New Testament believers who come to Jesus Christ. This verse has been one of the guiding Bible verses for our ministry. It reminds us of God's covenantal love, our identity and calling in Christ. Let's meditate on its meaning.

1) We are a chosen people: In the Old Testament, God chose Israel out of his covenantal love (Dt 4:37). Now this blessing belongs to all Christians. How is this possible? We are chosen through Jesus, who was rejected by humans, but chosen by God. This world wants qualified people who prove themselves through their performance. People struggle to be chosen. You should be good and qualified for a position or a title. Let's say you are chosen MVP (i.e. most valuable player) of your team. How happy would you feel when you are picked for that! But how sad would you feel when rejected. Christians are strangers to this world and often rejected. Who loves rejection? No one. That's why so many people are driven by peer pressure. Do you feel that you are not good enough to be chosen? But remember that we are chosen by God. We become God's people, not because we are better than others. It is entirely God's free gift. God took the initiative out of his one-sided grace. It is not that we loved God, but that God loved us first and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1Jn 4:10). God chose us as MVPs not because of our performance, but because of his grace.

2) We are a royal priesthood. This combines kings and priests into one role. As a corporate body the church is "a royal priesthood." This is a great teaching about the priesthood of all believers. This is the amazing fulfillment of God's original design when he created humankind. Adam and Eve were created to be covenant partners with God: to dwell with God, enjoy his presence forever and represent his gracious rule on earth. When they rebelled against God's rule, they fell to the bondage to sin and death, and we fell with them. But God gave his promise to Abraham to bless all peoples on earth through him. In Ex 19:5, the nation Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests to mediate God's blessing to the world. The offices of king and priest were both anointed and represented God's gracious rule. But at that time, they were strictly separated. While a king ruled people by God's law, a priest mediated between the holy God and sinners. But

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Jesus, who is our high priest and eternal king, has fulfilled both roles and combined them together for us.

Now, all believers are royal: we were slaves, but in Jesus, we are sons and daughters of God, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Ro 8:15; 1Pe 1:3). We are royal because God himself dwells in our midst (1Pe 2:5). We are also a priesthood. In the Old Testament, God established a priesthood for sinners to approach the holy throne of God. This was a pattern pointing to Christ. Israel failed to mediate God's blessing to the nations. But in his great mercy, the Son of God sacrificed his own life for sinners. By the precious blood of Christ, you and I can directly come to God without fear. In the name of Jesus, we can dwell in God's amazing presence. What a blessing!

We the church are now a royal priesthood. We all join in Christ's royal priesthood. Empowered by his Spirit, we represent God's kingdom. As a royal priesthood, we worship God together and pray for the world. Every believer participates in the royal priesthood where they are. When you go to school or work, you represent God's saving presence and mediate his blessing to people. Unashamed, you can bring God's blessing wherever you are. Praise the Lord for making us a royal priesthood!

3) We are a holy nation. To be holy means to be set apart for God (cf. 1Pe 1:15). This was Israel's calling to be holy to the Lord in everything, including their social relationships, diet, and finances. This was fulfilled in Jesus, who is completely holy and obeyed the Father even to the point of death on the cross. We are a holy nation because we are cleansed by Jesus' blood when we believe in him. Now our citizenship is in heaven. The church is a kind of a colony of heaven on earth. Our lifestyle is not ruled by the world, but by the holiness of Jesus. We should be like a thermostat, not a thermometer. While a thermometer only measures the room temperature, a thermostat sets and regulates the room temperature. When we live a life of holiness empowered by the Spirit, we can live as countercultural and influential Christians. The world worships idols, such as worldly success, self-glory, and physical pleasure. But God wants our church to live as a holy nation, choosing holiness over worldly pleasure and ambition.

4) We are God's special possession. You are called "God's special possession." By whom? It is the God of all creation who calls you special. The

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church is God's own treasured people. God placed special value in us. Do you believe that you are special to God? Once, we were slaves to sin. But now we belong to God because we have been purchased with a price; we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. The life of Christ has infinite value. The redemption by the sacrifice of Christ goes far beyond human imagination and calculation. There is no higher price than the one that Christ paid on the cross. So, do you believe that you are God's most special possession? Our God keeps us as the apple of his eye (Dt 32:10). Only when we accept such love of God can our lives be fully devoted to him. In view of these unbelievable blessings of God, what is your response? Jonathan Edwards, a preacher and the main figure of the first spiritual awakening in the U.S., confessed, "God is the inheritance of the saints; he is the portion of their souls. God is their wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their dwelling place, their ornament and diadem, and their everlasting honor and glory." Amen!

III. To Proclaim the Excellency's of God in Christ

Now, do you see how important and special you are? We are all given amazing blessings: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. What is our natural response to this? We want to love God the way he loves us. Look at verse 9 again. **"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."**

The verb declare means "to proclaim" or "advertise." The word praises can be translated as "excellencies" or "wonderful acts." The purpose of our high privileges is not to become proud, but to proclaim the excellencies of God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. The world is still in spiritual darkness due to sin. What is the only solution to defeat darkness? It is the light. The light of Jesus can penetrate the darkness of sin that plagues so many people. It is the revelation of Jesus that dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin. Jesus' power can break any chains of sinful darkness. Jesus' mercy can heal and restore sinners.

During college, I was rebellious against God, thinking that he was a controlling dictator. As a philosophy student I pretended to be a noble truth-seeker, but in reality, I was a miserable slave to people's approval and suffered from

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feelings of inferiority due to my short stature. Through Bible study, I heard Jesus praying for me on the cross, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** How could God the Almighty suffer on the cross for sinners? The moment I accepted this truth, the light of revelation began to shine on my heart and the power of God’s mercy broke the power of my sinful darkness. Now, I’m a part of his royal priesthood, enjoying his presence and proclaiming his mercy to the world.

I’m sure that many of us have testimonies. I want to share one person’s testimony from among us. He was completely unteachable. Eventually, he gave in to the darkness of his own heart and became an alcoholic and drug addict. Finally, he was arrested, found guilty of a serious crime and put in jail. One day, the reality of the power of death came upon him as he sat in his jail cell. There, he made a vow to God that if God would protect his life, he would fully repent and turn to him. In 2010, he was invited to a Summer Bible conference and heard Jesus voice: **“Repent and believe the good news”** (Mk 1:15). He repented of his sin and became a new creation in Christ. He became a missionary to a Moslem nation and married a woman of God. He does not define himself by his worst mistakes but sees himself as forgiven sinner and lives as a blessing for many students.

As a royal priesthood, we should also pray for America. This country was built with a vision of a city on a hill. God granted repentance and spiritual revivals to the churches (through the Great Awakenings). Last century, many missionaries were sent out from the US to bless the world. But today, Christian influence in our nation is declining. Secular education and ungodly culture devastate people’s minds and souls. Many Christians are not desperate for God and often compromise with worldly success and physical pleasure. Genuine Christians are increasingly experiencing more persecutions in their workplace, schools, and communities. So, what does America need most today? It is the power of the gospel of Jesus. We need a spiritual revival.

We have been preparing and praying for the ISBC. What is the point? It is to proclaim the excellency’s of God and his kingdom. We’ll proclaim the mercy of God so that people from all over the world will worship him. We’ll see together the glimpse of the glory of God’s kingdom. We’ll join in the song of heaven: **“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor and glory**

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and blessing!” (“Worthy Is the Lamb”; cf. Rev 5:10). We want to love God the way we are loved. May God grant us another spiritual revival in our church and North America to powerfully proclaim the kingdom of God!

Let me ask again: Do you know who you are? While living on earth, there are many things that compete to claim our identity. God wants us to deeply know who we are in this ungodly generation. We have the tendency to base our identity on our achievements or titles. But we make mistakes every day and don't perform well all the time. So, does this define who we are? Are you defined by your worst mistakes or by your best achievements? No! Look at 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.”** Our identity and status are solely based on God's mercy! It is the compassionate love of God that defines our identity every day. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. How can we be confident about this amazing identity? We must come to Jesus who is the unshakable evidence of God's mercy! As we constantly come to Jesus, we'll be confident about our identity as a royal priesthood in this generation. He alone is worthy of worship. Amen!