

Easter 5 / May 7, 2023

1 Peter 2:9

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

What are your most valuable possessions? Typically, we think of possessions as inanimate objects, but God’s most valuable possessions are people. We don’t like to think of ourselves as being someone’s possession. We are free people! We take pride in living in a free country. We pride ourselves in being free from birth. And while those are important concepts in regards to personal integrity, politics and human relationships, the spiritual reality of life is that no one is free from birth. God claims us as our Creator. The devil claims us because of our sin. Both seek to have us as their own. Death claims everyone conceived and born into this world of sin. We may be born free in a political sense, but spiritually we are born under the power of sin, the dominion of the devil and the condemnation of death.

The devil and death claim us because of our sin, yet God has not renounced His claim on us as our Creator, despite our sin. He reaffirmed His claim on humanity, the crown of His creation, by giving Jesus to live with us, die for us and rise for our redemption from sin, the devil and death. People often pay a high price for their most valuable possessions. No one paid a greater price for His most valued possessions than God. He gave His only begotten Son to share in our humanity. He took our place as a human being in fulfilling all righteousness. He paid the debt of human unrighteousness through the sacrifice of His body on the cross. God ransomed us from the power of sin, the dominion of the devil, the condemnation of eternal death and reclaimed us as His prize possession with the precious blood of Christ. Whatever we value most, God values us more! Whatever price we paid for our valued possessions, God paid the highest price to make us the people of His own possession.

Peter writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” All of those terms, race, priesthood, holy nation, and people of His own possession, are Old Testament references to the people of Israel. However, Peter is not writing to people we would consider to be the people of Israel, Jewish people. He is writing to people whom the Jews referred to as ‘Gentiles,’ the nations. The nations God did not choose to be His people. It’s curious that Peter would use these Old Testament terms referring to Israel, in reference to Gentile Christians. He does this because in Christ, God is creating a new Israel, a new holy nation. A people chosen by His grace, purchased from the bondage of sin, the power of the devil and the control of death, by the blood of Christ.

In Old Testament times, Israel was God’s chosen possession. He redeemed them from slavery to Egypt, through the blood of the Passover Lamb. He made them to be His people, through the covenant He made with them through Moses at Mount Sinai. He chose them to be His people, through whom He would make His name known to the nations. He chose them as the people through whom His Son would be born, by whom He would bring redemption from sin, the devil and death to the world. Israel in the Old Testament was the people God chose by grace to make His name known, so that through them He would bring the blessing of salvation to all the nations of the earth, through Christ Jesus.

In Old Testament times Israel became a racial entity, but God never intended the people of Israel to be a racial entity, separate from every other race. God created Israel to be a spiritual entity, composed of people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses; people who trusted God, took His words to heart and believed His promises. Abraham’s descendants became Hebrews, then Israelites and finally Jews. Abraham was neither Jewish nor Hebrew. Abraham was a Mesopotamian by birth, what we would now call an Iranian or Iraqis. Israel was the name God gave to Abraham’s descendants to mark them as His chosen possession. Israel was the people who believed God and followed in the faith of Abraham. Israel is the people who believe God’s promises are fulfilled and extended to all people in Christ Jesus.

Even in Old Testament times a person didn’t have to be a racial descendant of Abraham, or the twelve patriarchs to be counted part of Israel. She or he simply had to believe God, even as Abraham believed God and was counted righteous. Even at the time of Christ, a person didn’t have to be Jewish to be a member of Israel. Gentiles could become part of Israel, if they accepted the words of Moses and the prophets, promised obedience to the laws of the Mount Sinai Covenant and submitted to circumcision. God’s purposes in ancient Israel reached their culmination in Jesus and were fulfilled by the blood of His cross, by which He paid the debt of the sin of the world and ransomed all who believe from the power of sin, the dominion of the devil and the control of death. In

New Testament times all who receive Christ and believe in Him as their God and Saviour are part of God's new Israel, His chosen possession.

In Christ, God is creating a new Israel, a holy nation of believers from every nation, tribe and ethnic group under heaven. A people chosen by His grace, redeemed from death, ransomed from the power of the devil and washed of their sins by the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb who was slain. The church is God's treasured possession, composed of children, women and men, who through faith inspired by the Holy Spirit through the word and washing of baptism, confess Christ as Saviour. God's purpose for the Israel of the New Testament, is that like Israel of the Old Testament, we would proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of the darkness of sin and into His marvellous light.

God's purpose for His chosen people in the New Testament is the same as His purpose for His chosen people in the Old Testament, that we would believe Him and make Him known to the nations as God of grace, whose forgiveness is made full in Christ Jesus and offered for all to receive through faith in His name. God's purpose through Church, His chosen possession, is to call all peoples to faith in Christ through the proclamation of the gospel of grace, repentance and forgiveness. God's ultimate purpose for the church, for all who believe His word, and receive His redemption through faith in Christ as their Saviour, is freedom from the power of sin, the control of the devil and the condemnation of death, by sharing in Christ's resurrection to everlasting life.

God has a purpose for us at every stage of our lives and in every condition and situation of life. His first purpose is that we would believe His promises, so that our faith remains strong and is fulfilled in Christ's resurrection to everlasting life. We ensure this purpose is fulfilled by continually nourishing our faith with the pure spiritual milk of His word; spoken, written, given in the water of baptism and in the bread and wine of holy communion. God's purpose is that we would exercise our faith, by abiding in the fellowship of believers; supporting each other with our prayers, sustaining each other with our presence, comforting one another in our sorrows, forgiving each other patiently from the heart, even as He patiently forgives us from the heart of His love in Christ Jesus.

God's purpose is that as His chosen possession we would declare the excellencies of His grace, expressed fully in Christ and offered for all to receive through faith in Him as God and Saviour. We declare His excellencies and express our faith, by living as His people in obedience to His will as expressed in His Holy Word. We declare His excellencies and express our faith, by patiently enduring the sufferings and afflictions of life, trusting His promises, abiding in His grace given us in Christ, who also endured the sufferings of this life. We declare His excellencies and express our faith, by sharing in the proclamation of the gospel by supporting the ministries of the church and by participating in the ministry of the church, by telling others the greatest excellency of God; His grace of forgiveness in Christ Jesus, offered for all to receive and given freely and fully to all who believe in His Name.