

A HOLY PEOPLE

1 Peter 2:9-12

Introduction:

ST. PATRICK: STONES SQUASHED IN THE MUD

As a young boy Patrick lived a comfortable life near an English coastal city where his father was a deacon in their church. But at the age of 16, all that came to an end. Irish pirates attacked his village, abducting Patrick and many of the household servants. After arriving in Ireland, Patrick was sold as a slave to a tribal chieftain who forced Patrick to work with a herd of pigs.

In the midst of all that pig filth, God began to transform Patrick's heart. In his Confessions he wrote, "I was sixteen and knew not the true God, but in a strange land the Lord opened my unbelieving eyes, and I was converted." Patrick became convinced that the kidnapping and homesickness were actually opportunities to know Christ better. "Anything that happens to me," he wrote, "whether pleasant or distasteful, I ought to accept with [serenity] giving thanks to God ... who never disappoints."

After serving as a slave for six years, Patrick escaped, boarded a boat, and found his way back home. Finally, he was back on British soil, warmly embraced by his family and his community. In his own mind, Patrick was finished with Ireland for good. Patrick was adamant: "It is not in my nature to show divine mercy toward the very ones who once enslaved me."

But once again, God changed Patrick's heart. Partially through a dramatic dream, Patrick knew that God had called him to return to Ireland--not as a slave, but as a preacher of the gospel. His family and friends tried to stop him, telling him, "Why does this fellow waste himself among dangerous enemies who don't even know God?"

Despite their objections, Patrick used his own money to purchase a boat and sail back to Ireland in A.D. 432. Patrick then

spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel in Ireland, seeing many people come to Christ. He also passionately defended the human rights of slaves, writing a letter of scathing protest to King Coroticus after his soldiers had raided a village, slaughtered the men and sold the women into slavery.

Patrick never got over what God had done for Him. In his Confessions he wrote, "I was a dumb stone lying squashed in the mud; the Mighty and Merciful God came, dug me out and set me on top of the wall. Therefore, I praise him and ought to render him something for his wonderful benefits to me both now and in eternity." (John W. Cowart, People Whose Faith Got Them into Trouble. InterVarsity Press, 1990, pp. 31-42)

I am reminded of Psalm 40:1 – "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps."

Turn with me back to the book of 1 Peter. In last week's message, we saw how God is building for himself a temple, a dwelling place for His Spirit. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, the key part of the foundation, and we, believers in Christ, are living stones, being built into that spiritual house – see 2:4-5.

In vv. 6-8 we saw the contrast between those who believe and those who do not believe. There is honor for those who believe—they will not be put to shame—but dishonor for those who do not believe. They stumble over the "living stone" because they disobey the Word and are offended by Jesus Christ, the cornerstone.

We also looked at vv. 9-10 where we see God's description of who we are as believers and the role that we have in God's purpose and plan. He has called us out of the world and has shown us His mercy in order that we might "...proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light." (v. 9b)

This morning I want to take a closer look at vv. 9-10, and then go on to the next two verses – vv. 11-12. In this passage we have a marvellous description of the believer and his life. There are two main parts to this:

- The believer's identity – who we are in Christ (vv. 9-10)
- The believer's behaviour – how we ought to live in light of who we are in Christ. (vv. 11-12)

The Believer's Identity

So, who are we as believers in Christ? Peter says ... *read v. 9a*. The first thing we need to notice is that the descriptive terms used here are all corporate in nature. Peter's emphasis is not on individual believers. It is not about our personal blessings and responsibilities in Christ, but rather about the corporate body of Christ, the people of God. Each of these expressions is a corporate concept. When we, as individuals, come to personal faith in Christ for salvation, we enter into not only a relationship with God, but a body of believers. We become a part of a people, the church – the "called out" ones.

The second thing we need to realize about this description Peter gives is that these phrases are all taken from the OT. These corporate descriptions that Peter makes of the church are the same descriptions we find in the OT of the nation of Israel. Just listen to these verses:

*"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be **my treasured possession** among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a **kingdom of priests** and a **holy nation**. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Ex 19:5-6 ESV)*

*"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to **my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.**" (Isa 43:19-21 ESV)*

Then, consider verse 10 – *read it* – last week we looked at the OT connection to that verse from the book of Hosea. Through no merit or virtue of their own, God had chosen Israel and his descendants to be the recipients of his mercy. In Deut. 7, as Moses spoke to the people before they entered the promised land, he reminded them of this with these words:

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deut. 7:6-8 ESV)

In the years that followed, the people wandered away from God and rebelled, until the day came when God cast them off, saying that they would no longer be his people. But, through Hosea, God promised that the day would come when He would bring back the nation of Israel to their land and He would renew His relationship with them.

"And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'" (Hos. 2:21-23)

Now, Peter takes these descriptions and promises and he applies them to the church. This does not in any way invalidate the promises made to Israel, but he is pointing out that we too have been chosen, called out and made into a people belonging to God, not by any merit of our own, but by his great mercy.

I want to just make a brief comment about each of these four terms Peter uses:

A Chosen Race (people, generation) – the term refers to a family, kindred, nation – "the aggregate of many individuals of the same nature, kind, sort." Out of all the people in the world, God chose and called Abraham and made from him a great nation of chosen people. Now in this age, He has chosen and is calling out a people, those who believe in Jesus Christ, to bless them. They are called the church – the assembly of called out ones.

A Royal Priesthood – in the OT nation of Israel, God established the priestly system as a way to bridge the gap between Himself and sinful man. The only way one could approach God was through the priests. A person would bring his sacrifice and offer it before the priest and then the priest could take the blood into the tabernacle and approach God on behalf of the sinner. As believers under grace, we no longer need an earthly priest to gain access to God. Jesus Christ is the great high priest, and we are part of a priesthood which gives us continual access to God on the basis of Christ's blood.

A Holy Nation – When God chose Abraham, he called him to leave his country, to go to a new land where he would become a great nation. When his descendants came out of Egypt to return to that land, God made it clear that they were to be different from the other nations of the world. They were to be a holy nation, separate, distinct, set apart for God. Similarly, the church is a called-out assembly, a great nation of people who are to be separate, distinct from the world, set apart for God's purposes.

A People for His Own Possession – Over and over in the OT, God referred to the nation of Israel as "...my people." He chose them, called them and identified with them. They belonged to Him. Likewise, in the NT church, we belong to Him. In 1 Cor. 6 Paul says, *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."* Then, in 2 Cor. 6 he reminds us again that, *"...we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" (quote from Lev. 26).* You and I are part of a great worldwide body of believers that God calls his own—a people for his own possession.

Well, that is a quick look at the believer's identity. We still need to look at...

The Believer's Behaviour

How are we to live in the light of who we are in Christ? Given that we belong to God, how is that lived out in our daily life in this world?

Read vv. 11-12 – Peter's advice in these verses drives straight to the heart of our Christian walk. I believe we can summarize his instruction in three statements:

1. A holy walk is governed by a future hope – v. 11a. Because we are sojourners ... we need to consider how we live our lives. We need to live with a recognition that we are exiles here; our citizenship is in heaven. We need to live with eternity in view.

Titus 2:11-13 - "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ..."

2. A holy walk must be accomplished from the inside out – v. 11. Peter says, *"I urge you...to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."* Inner purity is where it must begin. *Prov 4:23 – "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."*

Jesus warned us that cleaning the outside is not enough. When the Pharisees condemned the disciples for eaten with unwashed hands, Jesus made it clear that it is what is inside, and what comes out of the heart that truly matters, not what goes in from the outside.

3. A holy walk must be lived in separation not in isolation – v. 12. Throughout history there have been those who believed that the way to live a holy life was to isolate themselves from everyone and everything that was unholy. So, they built monasteries or went and lived in a cave somewhere.

Peter indicates that we need to live holy lives right where we are – in the world but not of the world. We live our lives for God before the "Gentiles" – the ungodly, pagans. When we live the way we ought, they will have no excuse when they stand before God. They may accuse us and threaten us, but the light of a godly life will shine on them and reveal their own wickedness.

Matt. 5:16 – "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Discuss areas in which our life should reflect Jesus Christ and the glory of Jesus before the world:

- honesty
- speech
- conduct
- where we spend our time
- sexuality
- attitude toward others
- a life of integrity, in the midst of a world of immorality.

Conclusion

Read vv. 9-12 again – two questions...

1. Have you received Jesus Christ as Saviour, and become a part of that chosen race, a member of the called-out ones, who are God's own possession?

Offer an invitation to salvation...

2. If you are a believer today, are you living the kind of life Peter talked about in vv. 11-12? Does your life shine a light into a dark world, attracting people to glorify God for your honorable lifestyle?