

A Holy Nation and a Royal Priesthood

10/27/2024

Scripture 1: (1 Pet. 2:9-25 ESV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

- Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.
- Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
 - For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
 - Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.
- Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
 - Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

- He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.
- When he was reviled, he did not revile in return;
- when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.
- He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Scripture 2: (Phil. 3:20-21 ESV)

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Sermon:

There is something which must be said; something that we all need to be reminded of as an ordinary part of our lives, but which we especially need reminding of during the American political season:

- The United States of America IS NOT a Christian Nation. It never has been and it never will be. Our Constitution even ensures that it CANNOT be¹. If we were, then we would not have or need a President because Jesus Christ would be King of America, and we would not have or need the two chambers of Congress to make laws because God would sovereignly decree them, and we would not have a Supreme Court because every citizen would have already been passed through the final Judgment. Therefore:
 - The United States of America is fundamentally a human nation and a secular nation.
 - However, the United States of America was settled and founded by Christians, making it a “nation of Christians”; although over time the percentage of our population who live as Christians, much less those who identify themselves as Christians, has fluctuated and unfortunately decreased.
 - Regardless, our country is governed by laws that were inspired and influenced by Scripture and the morality of the Christian religion; at least, that was the intention according to our second President, John Adams, who wrote, “Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”²

The very important fact for us “Christian Americans” to remember, and to regularly remind one another of is that, although we are citizens of this earthly “American Nation”, our true nationality and eternal citizenship belongs to heaven, as our ultimate patriotic loyalty belongs to Jesus Christ, alone (Philippians 3:20-21). Therefore, we are charged to live as exiles in a foreign land: loyal to our homeland yet obedient and submissive to the local authorities; and the best expression of our Christian patriotism is to live in as close of conformity to Jesus Christ our King as we can. We express our patriotism by living holy because He has declared us: His people, His loyal subjects; to be a “holy nation”.

However, in this life, it is far too easy for each of us to become distracted by the cares of the world. We become anxious about the evil days in which we live, and we forget (even if only momentarily) where our only hope lies (Job 4:6; Psalm 33, 65, 146; Jeremiah 17:13; Matthew 12:18-21; Romans 5, 8). We allow ourselves to become consumed by a sinful love for the world as it presently is, instead of living as expressions of Christ's love for the world and everyone in it in anticipation and hope for how He will one day restore it to be.

- We easily forget that this world is not our “home”, instead of being our “temporary residence”.
- We forget that we are only just “passing through it” as transients, sojourners, and migrants who are always moving forward towards “...*the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*” (Heb. 11:10 ESV), eagerly awaiting the re-Creation and Restoration that will happen when Jesus Christ returns in Glory and Power (Revelation 21, 22).

This world in which we live is not “heaven on earth” and, no matter how hard we try or how much we wish it were, it never will be this side of the Judgment and Christ's return.

1 “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” 1st Amendment to the US Constitution, also known as the “Anti-establishment Clause”

2 John Adams, “Letter from John Adams to Massachusetts Militia,” 11 October 1798.

We each need to be reminded of this truth because while we are “visiting”, we also serve as “representatives” and “ambassadors” of heaven and Jesus our Lord. Even moreso, we live here as an “occupying force” of heaven. We have invaded, taken, and hold enemy territory: the claimed dominion of Satan, who is the lord of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; Eph 2:1-3) and spirit of this evil age.

Therefore, the Apostle Peter writes to us today, just as he wrote to the “...*elect exiles of the Dispersion...*” (1 Pet. 1:1 ESV); the Church of the 1st Century, to remind us of three things: “Who we are.”, “What our purpose is.”, and “How Jesus means for us to achieve it.”. Peter begins by declaring who the Church is, “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...*” and what her purpose is, “...*that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”.

So, who is the Church?

The Church is:

- a “*chosen race*”: We are a *genos eklekton* in the Greek, which means we are a “called out family”; {*genos* is the root source for genealogy and *eklekton* is derived from *ekklesia*, the “called out ones” and is the most frequently used Greek term translated as “church” in the New Testament}. This describes our relationship together and to Jesus Christ: we are family, and we are related. We are all brothers and sisters and cousins one to another, but more importantly, we are “called out”, which means that we have been picked and chosen by God to be His family.
 - Therefore, we know that we have been adopted and enjoy all of the same privileges and rights as natural born children, along with all of their same responsibilities and obligations.
- a “*royal priesthood*”: This describes both our social status and our vocation as religious royalty and priests. Kings throughout the Ancient Near East were often considered to be related to divinity: some were believed to be divine themselves {god-king; like the Persian Xerxes or Egypt's Pharaoh}, some were considered as a “child” of the deity {son of god; as the post-Julian Caesars were styled, with their predecessor having achieved apotheosis upon death}, while others simply served as the highest degree of priest within their cult {Israel's kings, like David served in a priestly “auxiliary” role, whereas Uzziah tried to usurp to High Priest's role and was punished by the LORD with leprosy; while many of the Babylonian kings also served as high priests for their preferred deity}. Regardless, the principal role and function of every priest, in any religion, is to serve as a mediator and intercessor between humanity and the divine; many times this involved offering sacrifices for the expiation of their sin and as a propitiation of divine favor.
 - Therefore, as the adopted children of the LORD God (John 1:12), the supreme Sovereign King, we have become royalty. We belong to the highest social tier. We are each as close to God as a person can be, without being God ourselves. There is no one between us and Jesus: neither Mary, nor any of the “Saints” stand any closer. Through Christ, each of us have a direct pipeline to God.
 - Therefore, as priests and since Jesus has satisfied all need for sacrifice, our principal remaining duty is to bring the love of God to the world and thus to point the world to Jesus Christ. Our mediatorial job, as priests, is to {love the LORD our God with all of our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind} by {loving our neighbor as ourselves} (Matthew 22:37-39).
- a “*holy nation*”: We are an *ethnos 'agiov* in the Greek, where *ethnos* describes a broad people group possessing a shared culture and ordinarily, some degree of familial relationship, wherease *'agios* or

“holy” is one of those “church words” that everyone thinks they know and understand, but which is really a term that is both exceedingly broad and unimaginably deep. Saying that something that is “holy” means that it is set apart or dedicated for a specific use and purpose; that it is pure, perfect, unblemished, uncorrupted, and undefiled.

- Therefore, as the adopted children of God, as the “saints or 'holy ones' of God”, because we have been integrated into the “heavenly ethnicity”, we are set apart from all the rest of humanity for divine purpose and, through our union into Christ as His brothers and sisters, we are and are being sanctified (being made holy): cleansed, perfected, and restored to the LORD's eternal intention for humanity and are thus enabled to do our duty as mediators between God and men.
- a “*people for his own possession*”: This means that we are one, united people group claimed by God as His personal property. We belong to God; He owns us. We are His, therefore He can and will do with us whatever He wills. He is free to love us, to raise us up, and to forgive us according to the determination of His will alone, despite anything we can, may, or will ever do, and He is also free to not.
 - Peter explains that “*Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God's people; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy.*”, qualifying how we may know that we are God's people: because we have received His mercy.
 - Mercy is the expression of His great love for us.
 - The LORD treats His possessions with mercy, equipping us and enabling us to do the work He has ordained for us (Ephesians 2:10) because we are His beloved children, just like Jesus Christ, our elder brother.

Next, what is the purpose of the Church?

The Church's purpose is to:

- “...*proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*” Our Number One job is to be heralds of Jesus Christ. We are purposed and commanded to declare Who He is and to declare the wonders that He has done before the whole world.
 - This is the Great Commission, to “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [Jesus has] commanded [us].*” (Matt. 28:19-20 ESV).
 - We are purposed to be similar to the celestial bodies, as how “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*” (Ps. 19:1 ESV).
 - We are the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the merciful ingathering of all the LORD's Elect, “*And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. "Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."*” (Isa. 12:4-6 ESV). Thus,
 - We are purposed to give thanks to God and call on Him as our deliverer.
 - We are to purposed to declare and proclaim His deeds and ensure that His Holy Name is exalted above all others.

- We are purposed to sing His praises. And,
- We are to purposed to rejoice because the LORD, Jesus Christ, is in our midst; He is Emmanuel, God with us!
- This is precisely why we teach and believe that “Man's chief end”, our principal purpose, is to worship the LORD and to enjoy Him, forever (WSC #1)!

This is the blessing we have received as God's children and this is our privileged purpose while we remain living within the world yet are set apart from the world (John 17:10-23).

Third, how are we commanded and instructed to achieve this, our God-given purpose?

- Peter explains and encourages us, “...as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” We must constantly be fighting against our sinful desires, the remnants of our old Adamic nature that always seeks to try and draw us back into the darkness.
- Peter also reminds us as part of his encouragement, that now that we belong to the LORD this world is not our home. It is just a “temporary residence” and “transient housing”, during the time we sojourn here as we await our final, full repatriation to enter into Christ's eternal kingdom.

However, simply telling us to wage this spiritual war with ourselves; instructing us to mortify our indwelling sin, is well and good but, how are we supposed to do that practically?

We achieve this by living as moral exemplars; by living righteous lives that are different from the lives of people who still belong to the world.

Peter tells us to:

- “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” Meaning that when we live good lives; when we are kind and considerate to others; when we do our good works of charity in the love of Christ; then the worldly people who **will** speak slander against us, even accusing us of being the immoral ones, will be required to bear witness to our obedient faithfulness: testifying to it and glorifying God for all the good we have done despite their wicked attempts to stop us (Matthew 5:10-12).
 - When Christ returns, the wicked will justify all of the good works that we do in Jesus' Name.
- “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.” Meaning that we are to obey the earthly authorities as if they were Jesus Christ, Himself, because they have been appointed and placed by God. The LORD has commanded and decreed that they are to rule and to exercise authority over us; intending for them to rule justly and with all righteousness, but even when they do not, their failure to rule righteously as the LORD's steward is upon their own head and conscience, as it was for King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - Therefore, through our faithful obedience to them as to the LORD, we shall disprove the charges against us when they wrongly claim that we are the lawbreakers, or that we are the unjust and wicked ones, according to the standards of a corrupted culture.

- However, even when these authorities do become wicked and corrupt, we still owe them the respect and honor due to their position, as well as our obedience provided that they do not cross the final line by commanding or mandating our participation in their wickedness and joining them in sin, as Peter elsewhere declared to the Sanhedrin “*We must obey God rather than men.*” (Acts 5:29 ESV).
- Doing this, we shall “*Live as people who are free, not using [our] freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.*” because we have been made truly free in Christ Jesus. We are now, no longer bound to live according to our old sin nature, now we may “choose the good” (as in Isaiah 7:15) and do that which is right and glorifying to God, as we should.
- “*Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*” Again, this means that we are to keep the Fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12; WSC #64-65) to its fullest and most complete extent, because we are being obedient for God's glory and honor not our own. Therefore, when we are subjected to gross acts of injustice on account of our faith, we enjoy the privilege of sharing in Christ's earthly sufferings (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Timothy 1:8-12).

Suffering injustice, on account of the Name of Jesus, is an act of our submission to the LORD because through it, we are being Christ-like; by suffering for our faith and for the absolute, unchangeable truth. “*For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*” Suffering injustice for the LORD, for the cause of Christ, follows the extremely well trodden example that Jesus walked before us. This trail blazed by Jesus was also traveled by the Apostles and many of the first and second generations of Christians, who also suffered persecution and martyrdom:

- because they refused to offer incense to the Emperor, in false worship, remaining faithful to the only Living God;
- because they proclaimed Jesus as the Lord of their life and their hearts, as “*Kurios Xristos*” instead of “*Kurios Kaisara*”, following and obeying the Eternal King with all steadfastness;
- because they lived differently from those around them, exhibiting a different more selfless ethic and living according to a higher standard of moral righteousness typified by *agape*, or selfless love, instead of *philautia*, or self-serving and self-gratifying love. They knew that although “*God is love.*” (1 Jn. 4:8 ESV), {God is *agape*.}, love is not God.

While all of these saints suffered injustice at the hands of earthly authority, and many of them died for their faith in Jesus, they did so without causing offense against the Law of God. Instead they offended against the demands of sin and Satan through their fidelity and faithfulness to Jesus Christ, in all things. All of the saints then, and all of the saints now, live this way and we do these things because it is our God-given calling and holy purpose. We live this way because of our Christ-likeness and our holy nationality, because of how the Holy Spirit is leading us, teaching us, conforming us, and sanctifying us to more and more closely resemble Jesus's likeness and example. All of the saints then, and all of the saints now, live this way because we follow the narrow path that Christ has lain before us by His example, because “*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*”

- Therefore, we mortify and flee our past sinfulness and sin, leaving them at the foot of Jesus' cross.
- Therefore, we live moral and good lives, speaking and living in the Truth.
- Therefore, whenever we are reviled on account of Christ, we do not return the abuse we receive because we know that the LORD Himself shall repay (Deuteronomy 32:35; Hebrews 10:3).
- Therefore, whenever we suffer on account of the Name of Jesus, we neither threaten nor complain, but suffer silently and willingly (Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32), like Christ, because we have each entrusted our souls and our lives to the only Just Judge, who shall judge all of heaven and earth on the last day.
- Therefore, we live and die in this way because of what Jesus has done for us; because “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, [so] that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*”; because He has transformed us and He transforms our lives so that we may achieve our God-given purpose.

Everything that Peter has been addressing with us in the passage, is part of our Doctrine of the Church; the doctrine which teaches Who We Are, What We Do, and How We Do It. As the Church, we belong to “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church” (Apostle's Creed) which means:

- that all of the teaching, believing, and worshiping of the Church has come to us from Jesus' Apostles through a consistent and unbroken chain across the millenia; although the degree of knowledge and understanding about these things may have been more and less at different times;
- that the Church is universal, being forever united into Christ and in the truth, in all places and all whens, although our degree of knowledge, understanding, and the fullness of revelation may have been more and less in different times;
- that the Church is holy: that She is, and we are, being sanctified, purified, and cleansed of all our sin, sinfulness, and sinful desires or inclinations, because we belong to God and are citizens of heaven.

That final point is precisely what Peter has been working towards throughout this passage.

Since the whole Church belongs to the LORD, alone, and we are a people sovereignly chosen by Him to serve Him as a “*royal priesthood*”, we are now transformed into a “*holy nation*” living under the ultimate authority and rule of Jesus Christ, our Prophet, Priest, and King even as we reside and submit to the secondary authority of our earthly rulers.

We are holy because Christ, the LORD, is holy (Leviticus 11:44; Matthew 5:48) and because He is the One who makes us holy, like Him.

Answering “Who is the Church?”, Peter explains that since Christ has declared us to be holy: decreeing that we are now and ever shall be holy; Jesus did what was necessary to make us into what He has said we are.

It is **only** because of everything that Christ did, by:

- living sinlessly;
- enduring unjust suffering, persecution, hatred, and execution;

- bearing the just consequence for our sins on the cross and imputing His righteousness to us, by grace in love;

that we are able to do any of our good works, or to live moral and exemplary lives, or even obey those who exercise authority over us, as faithful obedience to the LORD.

Although many people outside of the Church, all of the worldly people who live apart from Christ, will conduct themselves honorably, just as we do; pr will humbly subject themselves to the greater authority of others, as we do; they do not “*Live as people who are free...*” because they use their so-called “freedom” as a license to try and cover up their wickedness and evil.

The great difference on this point, between those in the Church and those outside, is the matter of our why's and our intention.

- The Church does these things and we Christians live this way because we have been made holy; because we are the redeemed of the LORD; because this is our faithful and obedient response to all that Jesus has done for and to us.
 - We do these things for the glory and honor of Christ, our LORD, because we are justified by His righteousness; *Sola Gratia*.
- Whereas, those outside of Christ may do similar things because their conscience: the Law of God which is written on the heart of all men (Romans 2:14-15); tells them that these are right things to do; or, because they falsely believe that perhaps, by doing these things and by living this way, that then they might gain just enough “credit” with the LORD to earn their way into heaven (by doing more good than bad, thereby balancing an imaginary spiritual scale).
 - They do these things for their own glory and honor because they simply seek to be justified through their self-righteousness; *Sola Boot-strappa*.

Therefore and finally, Church:

- Take courage knowing Who you are: “...*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...*”; and rejoice in Whose you are: “... *a people for [the LORD's] own possession...*”, because since you belong to God, then you may know that you are loved and cared for, far more than you can imagine.
- Fulfill your God-given purpose and “...*proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”. Share what the LORD, what Jesus Christ has done for you, in this life and in your expectant hope of the next.
- Remember, that while you presently live as “*sojourners and exiles*” your true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21) and you will be held accountable to our Eternal King for everything that you do, or do not do.

So, give God all the glory. Praise Him, all that draw breath! Be what He had declared you to be; be holy, for our Father in heaven is holy.

Be confident and take courage remembering that this world is not your home, your citizenship is elsewhere, and that no matter what those who live in the world decide, Jesus is the LORD and He reigns over all.

AMEN