

You are a Royal Priesthood

1 Peter 2:4-12

Key Verse: 2:9

“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.”

Happy New Year! Apostle Peter wrote this letter around AD 63 to Christians scattered throughout the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, which is present-day Turkey. At that time the first century Christians faced severe persecution and rejection. In that situation, Peter taught the early Christians who they really were in God and how they were to live in the world. If you were asked to describe yourself with one word, what would you say? In this passage, Peter tells us who we are in Christ. Our identity as followers of Christ is absolutely essential for our spiritual formation, growth and influence. May we renew our hearts to find our clear identity in God.

1. The living Stone (4-8).

Look at verse 4. “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him...” The early Christians were in fiery persecutions and trials. They needed a shelter where they could find rest and peace. Peter urges them to come to Jesus, the living Stone. The Bible introduces many nicknames of Jesus related to a stone, such as the foundation stone (1Co 3:11), the capstone or cornerstone (Mt 21:42), and the Rock that smashes all the kingdoms of the world (Da 2:34). Why is Jesus called the living Stone?

Look at verse 4 again. “As you come to him, the living Stone---rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him...” Jesus was rejected before he became the living Stone. In the parable of the tenants, the Jews killed Jesus and threw him out of the vineyard simply because he did not fit into their own expectations and demands. Men in their sinfulness and wretchedness killed him and threw him away like a stone rejected by a builder. But God raised him from the dead and made him the capstone of world salvation. God made Jesus the most important person in history. God made him the Savior of the world and the Christ of all peoples of all nations. Although Jesus was rejected by men, Jesus was chosen by God and became the most precious cornerstone.

Here Peter does not sympathize with the suffering Christians, but encourages them, saying that they are like Jesus. Look at 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.” Following Jesus will involve suffering and rejection. If a Christian has never been rejected, he is evidently a worldly Christian. He is the one who does not live according to the truth of God, but lives by the pattern of the world.

When we decide to do the work of God, we receive rejections one after another, instead of compliments from others. Who likes to be rejected? But, rejection and suffering do not crush us; rather, through them, we grow in our inner man as a holy priesthood. So we must thank God for the privilege to participate in suffering and rejection for Jesus’ name sake. This is the secret of being a fruitful one to one Bible teacher and disciple maker.

Look at verse 5 again. “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.” In this verse the spiritual house is comparable to the fellowship of Christians in Jesus. Christians do not live isolated lives, rather they must enjoy fellowship among Christians, supporting and encouraging one another, like stones in a building. In this way they establish a spiritual house, the church of God. This house is not an organization, but the body of Christ. If one part of the body is sick, then the whole body suffers. If one part is joyful, then the whole body rejoices. We can build up the body of Christ when we establish the spiritual house through beautiful Christian fellowship.

What promise is given to those who trust in Jesus? Look at verses 6-8. Peter says, “the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” To one who believes, Jesus is the rock of salvation. But to those who do not believe, he is the stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the message. Therefore, to accept or reject Jesus is a matter of eternal destiny.

2. A royal priesthood (9-10).

Look at verse 9. "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." This verse is so beautiful but so difficult to understand the implication. So let's read one more time verse 9. In this verse Peter declares the spiritual identity and privileges of Christians. Who are we? We are: "a chosen people," "a royal priesthood," "a holy nation," and, "a people belonging to God." These are titles which God used for his people Israel (Is 43:20, Ex 19:5,6). But Peter applied these titles to the spiritual Israelites who have been converted through the blood of Jesus. Let's think about the meaning of each of these.

First, a chosen people. Humanly speaking, the early Christians who were scattered all over the Roman Empire were nameless people. They were immigrants in foreign lands. But Peter said they had a new identity in God. Once the Israelites were slaves but later they were called as God's chosen people. Their status was changed. In the New Testament however, Christians have a new identity as God's chosen people not based on ethnicity, but based on faith in Jesus. This agrees with Paul's concept of adoption in Romans 8. In Christ, human distinction disappears. Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." One thing I like about our UBF church is that we are very diverse. When we come together in Christ human distinctions don't matter anymore. As God's children, we are together as his chosen people. These days, several American politicians are working hard in the hope to be chosen as the next President of the United States. Actors who are chosen for the lead role are so happy. How about being chosen by God? To be chosen by God is the most privileged and honored position in the world. We Christians are chosen by God; not by vote, but by divine choice. (Jn 15:16a)

Second, a royal priesthood. The early Christians were like refugees in a foreign land. People despised them and looked at them as strange people. Their children also might have been ashamed of their identity as Christians. Maybe they complained, "Why can't we be like others?" But Peter said to them, "you are a royal priesthood," meaning, "You belong to a kingly family."

Two years ago Dr. T. Lunkim, who translated the Bible in my mother tongue in India, came to visit Chicago. He also visited me. He told my wife and my children that I am from a kingly family, and my children are princesses. They couldn't believe it and said, "What!" Likewise, when the early Christians, who were living like homeless people, heard that they were a royal people, they might have said, "What!" It is hard to imagine that we are all royal family and princes and princesses. What an awesome privilege we have in Christ Jesus! This is what our identity is in Christ Jesus. Once there was a prince who went to the market place dressed in a beggar's clothes. People laughed at him, not knowing he was a prince. He looked like a beggar, but he knew who he was. So he was not ashamed. Likewise, if we know our identity in God, we don't have to be ashamed of ourselves, even if we live at the bottom of society. Instead, we can live like princes and princesses. Please say to the person next to you: "You are in a royal family."

What, then, is God's purpose for choosing us as a royal family? Do you know what it is? Peter said, "you are a royal priesthood." With great privilege comes great responsibility. I know we like to be called "royal," but "a priesthood" does not appeal much to us. Then what is the duty and privilege of a priest? In the Old Testament, priests were chosen to serve God in the temple. Their duty was to offer sacrifices for sin (Lev 1:1-17). They taught the word of God (Lev 10:11). They interceded in prayer for the people. Jesus is our Great High Priest and King. He is the mediator between God and man. Since we belong to King Jesus, we are all royal priests. In short, Bible teachers, shepherds and missionaries are all royal priests. In our ministry, we have the priestly duty to teach God's word to college students and offer intercessory prayers on their behalf. All of us should be leading people to God. To be used by God as a royal priesthood is the most awesome privilege and honor, more than anything else in the world.

Third, a holy nation. A holy nation is not a nation with geo-political boundaries but a nation under God. The early Christians were scattered to different nations. They did not have a national identity, but God gave them one to be a holy nation. Holiness is the distinctive characteristic of God and of his people. Holy means set apart. Therefore, Christians must be different from worldly people. We don't do, enjoy or pursue the same things the world does. A Christian is one who is redeemed at the cost of Jesus' precious blood. We are called to be a holy nation. During the last week of 2007, our young disciples and high school students spent 3 days in Bible retreats. How beautiful it is to grow in holiness, rather than indulging in worldly pleasures, like ski trips or beach parties. We cannot make

ourselves holy, but when we come to Jesus in Bible study and prayer, we can grow in holiness. When each individual Christian lives a holy life, God can use us to raise a holy nation and influence the whole world.

Fourth, a people belonging to God. The New Living translation says, "God's very own possession." What a blessing it is to belong to God as his treasured possession! There are so many lonely people who feel unwanted. People will sometimes do desperate things to find a sense of belonging. People want to feel they belong to something or someone. God called you to belong to him! God says, "You belong to me!" Jesus said in Jn 15:19, "...you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world."

What was God's main purpose in choosing us as a royal priesthood? Look at verse 9b, "...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." What does it mean to live in darkness or in his wonderful light? In Mark 5, Jesus met a man living in the darkness of demon-possession. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" and drove the demons out of him. Jesus gave him new life and mission, and the man went and told how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. Before Peter met risen Jesus, he was cowardly and proud. But after he met risen Jesus, he became bold and fearless and a foundation rock in the early Christian church. Do you have a testimony of how Jesus has brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light? Please write it down even briefly, and share it with someone this week as spiritual homework.

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." In this verse Peter reminds them of their past miserable lives when they were without God. They were like slaves, suffering endlessly with a heavy burden and load of work. All they wanted was to eat three meals a day and get some rest for the next day. It was an endless cycle of suffering. Spiritually speaking, that is the description of life before knowing Christ. But by God's great mercy they became a people of God and received mercy. Not only that, they have the precious mission as a royal priesthood. What an awesome privilege and blessing it is to receive God's mercy and to have a mission to be a royal priesthood.

Before I came to Bible study in UBF, I didn't know my identity in God. In India, it is a great honor and privilege to get into Indian civil service. I thought if I get that position I would find my meaning and purpose of life and be satisfied. But in spite of many attempts, I failed. I felt I was not smart and no good. During that time a fellow student who was preparing for the civil service committed suicide in the JNU library. As a result, I became even more frustrated and despaired. If I have to use one word to describe myself I would say, "I was a restless wanderer on earth." Even after I came to study the Bible I could not get out of my mind the way I thought about myself. One day I was at the crossroads of my life direction. I made a firm decision to trust in God based on Matthew 6:33. I decided to lay a foundation of my life on Jesus. Then, the word of God began to help me to discover my new identity in God. I realized that I am a royal priesthood. Finding my new identity gave me joy, peace, a sense of security, meaning and purpose. Today I am here proclaiming the awesome praises of God who called me out of darkness into his wonderful light. I praise God for this.

Accepting "what God says who we are," is the beginning of finding our true identity in God. When we accept this, it won't matter what other people say about us. What matters is what God says about who we are. We cannot just live as Christians without finding our identity in God. Our identity as followers of Christ is absolutely an essential part of our spiritual formation, growth and influence. Let us find our true identity in God and live as a royal priesthood.

3. The lifestyle of a royal priesthood (11-12).

Let's read verse 11. "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." Christians who are royal priests, first of all must abstain from sinful desires which war against their souls. Otherwise, they cannot be good examples to pagan people who live according to their sinful desires. Look at verse 12. "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Christians must live good lives in this sinful and corrupt generation so that the world may see our good deeds and magnify the name of God and glorify God.

In conclusion, tying it all together, we learn that we have a new identity in Jesus. God called us to be a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people belonging to God. Our priestly duty is to proclaim the word of God to campus students. We are to take their problems to God through prayer. There are so many people in the world who need to know their true identity in God. The things of this world cannot make us happy. It won't meet

our needs. Today let us accept our new identity in God and live our lives as a royal priesthood. May God use you and me to carry out our priestly duty as Bible teachers, shepherds and prayer servants and make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Let's read verse 9 again. "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."