

The People of God.

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[0 : 00] The reading is from 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2. We begin at verse 4.

The living stone and a chosen people. 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. For in Scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.

They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for. 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.

[1 : 44] 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.

Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul, 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 that he visits us.

Amen. Good morning, St. Silas. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the senior pastor here. It's great to have you with us. If you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Peter chapter 2, that would be a great help as we look at God's word together in this series on what is the church.

But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for your word and that the unfolding of your word brings light to our eyes and to our lives.

We ask that you give us ears to hear your word, heads that can understand, and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[3 : 09] You can find an outline on the back of the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we think about this together. Just recently, I watched the movie Spider-Man Into the Spider-Verse with one of our kids.

That's my excuse. But if you've watched it, if you haven't watched it, it's Spider-Man Meets the Multiverse Theory. So there are lots of Spider-Mans meeting up from different parallel universes. And the animation is unbelievable. It's absolutely stunning. Anyway, while lots was different about this Spider-Man movie, you've still got the Peter Parker principle. Do we all know the Peter Parker principle?

I don't know how many of you are Spider-Man fans. But it's this. With great power comes great responsibility. And I think we could say the same about privilege.

With great privilege comes great responsibility. And what we see this morning is that the Apostle Peter wants us to see that the same goes when it comes to how we stand with God.

[4 : 08] If you come to Jesus, you get the most extraordinary, undeserved privileges. And with those privileges comes a sense of responsibility to live out who we are.

And we've been seeing that in recent weeks. We're in this series asking what on earth is the church? And we're looking at four powerful images from the Bible of what the church is. They're not just true of the church generally.

These images should describe what every local church is and is called to be. Maybe they could be images that you could use next time you're talking to somebody about what church is to you.

With great privilege comes great responsibility. So we heard that church first, it's the body of Christ and we're called to serve together. And then we heard that we're the family of God called to love each other deeply.

And then we heard last week that we're the temple of God. There are no holy buildings anymore. There's a holy people. And when we look around at one another, this is where God has made his home in us.

[5 : 17] And that gives us a duty to God, to live for him, living our lives as a joyful offering to him. Today, Peter tells us that we are the people of God on display.

The people of God on display to a watching world. And it's worth saying as we think about those four pictures, you can't just choose your favorite one and find a church that kind of is one of them. Or as a church, we can't just say, well, you know, we're doing fine as a church because we're really passionate about worshipping God, but where actually we don't really have a culture of serving together.

We can't say, oh, well, we're a church that really loves like a family, but let that be an excuse for being insular and not really engaging with the world around us. As a church, maybe we could be asking, well, which of these pictures are we weakest in where we need to pray and grow in?

The body, the family, the temple, the people. And so this morning, as we look at the people, we're looking at verses 9 to 12 of chapter 2 that we had read for us. And we get a new identity, a new purpose, and a watching world.

[6 : 24] So first, a new identity. In verse 7, Peter described the world as those who don't believe. And he said that people have stumbled over Jesus because they don't believe in him.

They've stumbled. And that's in verse 8 about stumbling because they disobey God's message about the risen King, Jesus. And now in verse 9, he turns with this but to describe Christians, all Christians together.

He says, but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. A chosen people.

So when we put our trust in Jesus, we make a personal choice. We choose him, but in a deep, special way, God is choosing us. He's chosen us.

And then he says, you're a royal priesthood. We're a priesthood because the priesthood is set apart for God. And when you come to trust Jesus, you're part of that people who God has chosen to serve him.

[7 : 31] And it's a royal priesthood because we know and we're known by a king, by God's anointed king, the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he says, you're a holy nation.

We might feel a sense of pride about the nation that we belong to. Maybe you're Chinese or you're French or you're Scottish and you feel proud about that. But when you become a Christian, you get this dual citizenship.

And the nationality that kind of trumps the others is citizen of heaven, a citizen of God's nation, called out from the world to know him and be known by him.

And then he says, you're God's special possession. And these terms, they're a reference back to something special in history.

If we look back all across human history, there is a group of people for whom God really showed up in human history. They were Abraham's descendants and they become, in God's kindness, a great nation of probably around two million people.

[8 : 33] at the time of the Exodus, they were in Egypt in slavery. And God raised up Moses as a leader to lead them miraculously through signs and wonders out of Egypt so that they could come to worship God.

And he led them under Moses to Mount Sinai and they stood at the mountain as Moses went up and got the law of God, the Ten Commandments. And just before they got those commandments, God said this to them, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So he gave those people, Israel, this immense privilege as he called them to be his people, chosen by God.

He gave them his law to mark them out as different from the world around them. And later they were given God's prophets, bringing God's word to them. They were given God's kings, his royal

line, to lead them.

And Peter, who wrote this, he knew how special that was. He knew how special it was to be born into that nation. He would have grown up like all Jewish people at his time, thanking God every day that he was part of that nation, that he wasn't a Gentile, a foreigner.

[9 : 54] But then he became a follower of Jesus. And we hear in Acts chapter 10 about the day that Peter was praying and about midday he fell into this trance and God gave him a vision and in the vision a sheet was lowered down in front of him and on the sheet were all kinds of animals that for a Jewish person under the Old Testament law were unclean.

And then he heard three words that completely transformed Peter's whole understanding of the people of God. He heard a voice say, rise, kill, eat.

And he said, but these things are unclean. And he was told that they're not, that what God has declared clean no one should say is unclean. But the key thing is Peter realized this isn't just about food laws, this is about people.

That means that anybody now, anyone who comes to Jesus becomes part of the people of God. No foreigner could be called unclean. When they come to Jesus, they are part of God's holy nation, his special possession.

So those titles spoken thousands of years earlier by God to the Exodus generation, they're now true for us when we trust Jesus. God says to you and me, even though the whole world is mine, you are for me.

[11 : 14] You are my treasured possession. It's a very big deal in the world today, isn't it, to know who you are. The importance of knowing who you are is very important to us.

Even of being able to choose who I am, of maybe feeling that I have to work out who I want to be and become who I want to be. So in the movie Rocketman, Elton John says to someone about, I mean, it's an awful film basically, but Elton John is just, it's really dark because he's so discontent discontent and miserable and unhappy and trying to be somebody.

And he says at one point, you've got to kill the person you were born to be to become the person you want to be. As though he's trying to shake off an identity and who he was in terms of family and background to build a new thing that he can be.

But that idea that we have to make ourselves into who we want to be can leave you feeling exhausted, deeply insecure because you're enslaved to the things that you think make you who you are and unsure really who you really are and where we really belong.

But God speaks into that and he says, come to me through Jesus and I will freely give you the identity that I made you for. I'll give you an identity that will give you a sense of security and belonging that no one can take away.

[12 : 43] We don't have to earn it. We hear that next. Look at verse 10. He says, 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.

God calls us out and it's freely given to us this great privilege of being his people. And just think how differently that could make us feel about church. I don't know what you often think of when you think of church or coming to church.

Maybe you think of a bit of a burden, a bit of a chore, a meeting you have to go to or a set of commitments that crowd the diary, a social club, a place where we sing, a preaching station. The Lord says, whatever goes wrong in our life, by calling us into his church, he has given us everything we'd ever need to be part of his people.

There is no greater privilege than to be a member of God's church. When we walk into a local church on a Sunday, we see God's special possession all around us.

[13 : 54] You might be someone in a job Monday to Friday where everyone looks up to you. Maybe you feel that way, you feel significant and when you come into church, it just feels like an anti-climax.

Well, 1 Peter says, no matter how it looks, your greatest privileges, your highest calling, are about being part of this people. That's our first point, a new identity.

So with that great privilege, what's the responsibility? Well, it comes as we hear what we're for.

That's our second point, a new purpose. And the purpose comes in verse 9.

If we just look back at that again, he says, you're God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

That's our mission statement, to declare God's praises. We do that when we meet together, don't we? When we meet together and we speak to one another about God, when we sing together, we declare God's praises to him and to each other.

[15:01] Perhaps we do that on our own as we pray on our own. We do it wherever. We speak about God, about God's goodness, about Jesus, to other people. We declare his praises. And that's what we're for now.

Mission statements are useful, aren't they? A good mission statement really helps you clarify your purpose. I was looking at some mission statements this week. I wonder if you can guess where they're from.

Here's one. To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world. And if you have a body, you are an athlete. You know who that is?

That's Nike. And Nike, you might, I don't know what you think of that mission statement, but in the 1970s, they had a different mission statement. And it was this one. Kill Adidas.

That was their mission statement at that time. How about this one? To refresh the world. To inspire moments of optimism and happiness. To create value and make a difference.

[16:02] That is Coca-Cola. Isn't that extraordinary? Okay. And then there's another one here. To save the world from mediocre coffee.

I don't know whether you know that one. That's Costa Coffee. A mission statement can help. It can motivate. And God crowns his people with these great privileges.

And then he gives us this mission statement to declare his praises. And when we praise him, it's good for us. Of course, it's the right thing to do because he made everything.

He deserves praise. But when you praise something, it helps you enjoy it more. I don't know whether you've noticed that in life. If you think about something you might praise, maybe you think about a music concert you go to and how much you enjoy it and telling someone about it or your favorite sporting moment and retelling it to someone else.

Well, as you recount what happened in that sporting moment or that concert, who's really enjoying it? The person who's hearing? No, you're doing that because you're loving reliving the story.

[17:08] And as we declare God's praises, we enjoy him. We enjoy him more. And if we don't feel like praising God, the place Peter would have us look is at what he's done for us and how much that transforms us.

You see him say that in verse 9, don't you? Declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. And if you're here as a guest looking at Jesus, you might think that's very confronting, isn't it, to be told that Peter says, the Bible says, until we come to Jesus, we're in darkness.

And I was thinking, well, what does Peter mean by that? And earlier on, he describes life without God as an empty way of life. And I think that's a very powerful picture, that for all the things the world could offer us, God's Word would have us think of life without God as having an emptiness. He talks in chapter 1, verse 3, about the hope that you get when you become a Christian. And I take it that what he means is that the darkness that we're in without God is that we live with no hope beyond death.

So we live our whole lives with no hope of escape from the cycle of suffering and death, suffering and death, suffering and death. And there's the darkness of knowing, of hearing, that we've not lived God's way, that compared to God's holiness, we're not the people we should be.

[18:33] And so we face an eternity away from God and His goodness. It's darkness without God. And Peter says, when you come to hear of Jesus and you trust Him, God calls you out of that darkness and into His wonderful light.

His wonderful light. So it's like a hostage situation where you're trapped somewhere in the dark, in a foreign land, and it's as though someone has broken in in a rescue operation and grabbed you and pulled you out and let you escape into the wonderful light of freedom.

The wonderful light of hope because Jesus has risen from the dead. And so we know that there's living hope of life beyond the grave, a glorious future. The wonderful light of forgiveness, the wrath of God against our sin taken away.

The wonderful light of knowing the living God today. So that in verses 8 and 9 of chapter 1, Peter says, you know Jesus and you're filled with inexpressible and glorious joy from knowing Him.

So the natural response of God's people is to declare His praises because He's transformed everything about us. And that's about what we say, but it's also about how we live in the world. [19 : 51] So that's where Peter goes next, out into the world with our third point. We've had a new identity, a new purpose, and our third point, a watching world. So again, with great privilege comes great responsibility.

Just have a look with me at verse 11 again. He says, Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

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.

So the people of God don't retreat from the world when we're transformed. We go out into the world to live distinctively. He says, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, if you don't truly feel at home among your neighbours, your classmates, your colleagues, that's right because we're not at home. We're not at home yet. But we're called to remain in the world and live obedient, distinctive, good lives. And I think one of the reasons that we want to fit in so much is because we lack confidence in our identity, don't we, a bit?

[21 : 07] Don't some of us, we lack confidence that God's calling on our lives is really this special and His way of living really will work in the world. It really is what's best for us.

Lots of the behaviour around us that the world approves of that we might get drawn into is actually destructive for who we are. And God calls us to something better that will make us look foreigners, exiles, aliens, strangers in the world, but knowing all the while, but I'm God's special possession. I'm one of His holy people. But to live that out, we have to go to war. It's not just peer pressure that inclines us to go the way of the world. We see that in verse 11, don't we?

He says, as foreigners and exiles abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul. There are desires within us that are not good for our spiritual lives.

Whatever that might be for you, whether it's greed or it's lust or the desire to be on top that means that you put other people down. And as those desires wage war, we need the greater desire within us to please God.

[22 : 21] The more in our hearts we can sing about what God has done for us, the more we can get to a point where we think, you know, I'd like those things.

In one sense, I desire those things. But actually, my deeper, greater desire is to please God. and to abstain from those things. So we fight that inner battle.

And here's the key with the watching world. When you look at verse 12, our godliness, our goodness is the only hope for the people around us.

It's their only hope. Have a look at verse 12. It's that they would see our good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us, His day of salvation.

So what's God's great evangelistic strategy for the people around us? You wouldn't find it in a technique or a clever argument or a new book.

[23 : 18] It's us, as people, living such good lives before the watching world that people turn back to Him. In fact, by the time you get to chapter 3, the next chapter, verse 15, Peter talks about always being prepared as a Christian to give an answer whenever anyone asks you to give a reason for the hope you have.

You see his assumption there, be prepared because your life will make people ask questions. Next year, we're hoping to be involved as a church in a nationwide outreach campaign called A Passion for Life.

And I'm sure we'll have some training as we build up to that. We'll have some thoughts about how to share your faith with a friend, how to answer a question they might have.

At the same time, the most effective people at leading others to faith, often, not always, but often, are not the people with big brains who can answer questions.

Often, it's actually the newest Christians. Why is that? It's because often the newest Christians are thrilled that God has called them out of darkness into light and they naturally want to speak about him and praise him.

[24 : 28] And they've changed. They've changed in front of their friends. Their friends think there's something different about how they're living. So for any of us, the questions to ask ourselves, I guess, are, do I believe this?

Do I believe my friends, colleagues, classmates are in darkness? And is my life making the people around me ask questions?

Am I distinctive? Am I distinctively godly so that my life makes my friends ask questions? And when I speak about Jesus, there's a credibility to that message.

And we shouldn't be held back by being thought of as the bad guys. Did you notice that? I think that we are having to get used to now in the last, I don't know how many years, but in recent years, we're getting used to the fact that as a Christian, more than a generation ago, you thought of being a bad guy for following Jesus.

The things we think of are good, we're told are bad. But let's not think that's new. Do you see that in verse 12? He says, 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.

[25 : 44] So there will be people saying, you're the bad guys and accusing us of doing wrong while others are drawn in to the light of Jesus Christ. And we see that, don't we?

When you ask somebody, for all the flack Christians get, when you ask someone how they became a Christian, so often they will talk about a Christian friend and they'll say there was something about them.

Maybe when people look at you, they could see a different perspective in worries about the pandemic, about exams, about money, that there's something different. There's a peace and joy. Of course, we worry, but there's something different about the way we handle it. Maybe they'd see a different concern for others, a generosity, a concern for the poor, giving our time, our resources to help those in need.

Maybe they'd see a depth of friendship. It can be as simple as thinking, could I be the person at work who genuinely knows the names of the kids, of my colleagues, and just takes an interest in them?

[26 : 50] Or when my friend or colleague tells me something that's important to them, I actually remember and I go back and ask them about it so that then when they're really worried about something or life really goes belly up for them, I might be one of the people they would trust to speak to.

It's great hearing from Christians in sport, isn't it, this morning. Maybe that spurs all of us on a bit to think of everywhere we spend time about are there people I could be praying for and looking to live differently in front of and looking to speak of Jesus with.

And if we feel I just don't know anyone like this, I don't know where I could start with it, maybe you could be someone who gets going with international students.

As tens of thousands of them come to Glasgow, it would be wonderful if some of us actually felt that we were going to devote less time to our friends in Glasgow in order to make the time to welcome people from overseas.

With great privilege comes great responsibility. We've thought about those privileges, wonderful, a new identity. We've thought about the purpose God gives us, declare the praises of Him.

[28 : 06] And then about our responsibility to a watching world, a place we don't retreat from into a Christian bubble. We go out into the world feeling secure in our identity, positive about life, looking to be godly, looking to be a good friend, looking to live such a good life that others see our good deeds and they, in turn, come to God's precious cornerstone and they join the family of God and the temple of God and the people of God living in His wonderful light.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise You and marvel that You would bestow on us these extraordinary titles that we would be Your chosen people in the Lord Jesus, that thanks to His work at the cross, You would call us Your special possession.

Father, would You, by Your Spirit, empower us and enable us to live such good lives that the people around us, though some would accuse us of doing wrong, may see distinctive, godly living and turn back to You, that the Lord Jesus would be their Savior.

We ask in His name. Amen. 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 and into His wonderful light.

Father, we rejoice and we give You great thanks and we praise You that we have been called out of darkness and into the wonderful light that we, with this great privilege, comes enormous responsibility to shine that light into the world around us.

[30 : 06] Please help us to live cheerful, optimistic, hope-filled lives as we look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus. Please help us to rejoice in our King day by day, trusting and knowing that He will return and take us to be with Him in heaven forever.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.