

Pairs in Peter **Chosen race, royal priesthood**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Today, we will consider the second pair in our series of four talks, "Pairs in Peter." This talk looks at two subjects in 1 Peter 2:9: a "Chosen Generation" and a "Royal Priesthood."

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

A chosen generation

We can trace the theme of being chosen throughout the Old Testament. Israel is described as God's chosen people in the Old Testament. They descended from Abraham, who was chosen out of idolatry to become a man of extraordinary faith. His son Isaac was chosen above his elder brother Ishmael to be Abraham's heir. Also, Isaac's younger son, Jacob, was chosen above Esau, his elder brother, to become Isaac's heir. Jacob's name was changed to Israel when he met God at Peniel in Genesis 32. Jacob had twelve sons and ended his days in Egypt, where his beloved son, Joseph, had become, by God's intervention, the administrator of Pharaoh's vast empire. Jacob's twelve sons became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

But over the course of time, the children of Israel became slaves to the Egyptians, until God chose Moses to lead them out of slavery to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This nomadic journey lasted forty years. During this time, God proved His faithfulness, gave the nation the Law, and instructed Moses to build a tent called the Tabernacle, so that God could dwell among His people. He also established a priesthood taken from the chosen tribe of Levi and headed by the first high priest, Aaron. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses addresses his people, reminding them of God's care and faithfulness and their responsibility to live their lives for Him:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Then in chapter 7, Moses declares,

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (vv. 6-8).

Sadly, there were repeated failures throughout the wilderness journey, but ultimately God fulfilled His promises, and Joshua, Moses' successor, led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. There, the Tabernacle was erected, the priests fulfilled their spiritual service, and the judges governed the tribes. Samuel was the final judge of the nation. God used him to revive His people, and he wisely governed them into old age. But Israel wanted to become like other nations and have a king to rule over them. Samuel was heartbroken at this prospect, but God said to him,

Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them (1 Samuel 8:7).

God gave them a king, Saul, who failed dreadfully before being replaced by Israel's great King David. David was succeeded by his wise son, King Solomon. These were, for the most part, powerful and glorious reigns. David prepared the materials for building a temple for God to dwell amongst His people, and Solomon built it. But after Solomon's death, the kingdom was divided into two parts: Israel and Judah. The rest of the history of the kings is, with some notable exceptions, a downward spiral into idolatry and unrighteousness, leading to the divided nation's captivity, first in Assyria and then in Babylon. God displays His great faithfulness during this dark period and ensures that His people return to the Promised Land. The Old Testament closes with God's thoughts towards a remnant of His people, who, despite everything, remained faithful to the God of faithfulness. He describes them as "My jewels" (Malachi 3:17).

The Israel Jesus was born into was not populated by people who worshipped wooden and stone idols. Instead, its leaders had made an idol of the Law and became self-righteous, hypocritical, spiritually and morally blind, and unjust. John the Baptist calls them a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7). Jesus calls them "a wicked and adulterous generation" (Matthew 16:4). The nation God had chosen to honour Him before the world became the nation which rejected and crucified His Son.

A new chosen generation

Peter begins chapter 2 of his first epistle by encouraging his Christian readers to lay aside the characteristics of their former lives and grow in grace:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious (vv. 1-3).

In verses 4-5, He centres their lives on Christ, describing Him as the living stone who is the foundation of His Church:

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Peter's words take us back to Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16. [Caesarea Philippi is the ancient city originally called Baniyas, a derivative of Paneas. It was a centre for the worship of the Greek god Pan. Later, Herod Phillip, the son of Herod the Great, renamed the city Caesarea Philippi in honour of Caesar Augustus and himself.](#) In this place, established to honour gods and great monarchs, Jesus chose to ask His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" The disciples list the great prophets of the present and past that the people thought Jesus might be: "John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then Jesus asked the most critical question, "But who do you say that I am?" Without hesitation, Peter declares, "You

are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responds, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” What Peter said came as a direct revelation from God the Father. John writes at the very beginning of his Gospel,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

Jesus added,

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

In 1 Peter 2, the apostle makes it crystal clear that the rock Jesus referred to was Christ Himself. He is the rock upon which His Church is built, “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God.” Through faith in Him, we have life and are described as living stones that “are being built up a spiritual house.” He also quotes from Isaiah:

Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame (1 Peter 2:4-6, Isaiah 28:16).

There is no doubt Christ is the rock of our Salvation.

In Matthew 16, Peter was given apostolic responsibilities:

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

These are evidenced at Pentecost (Acts 2) and in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), where Jews and Gentiles respectively are led to Christ through Peter’s ministry. Matters of apostolic judgment are seen, for example, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). In Matthew 16:19 the Saviour was preparing the minds and hearts of His apostles for the day they would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and empowered to be Christ’s witnesses as Acts 1:8 makes clear:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Before speaking about Christians being chosen, Peter first refers to Jesus being chosen, “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (1 Peter 2:4). The extent of that rejection is also revealed by Isaiah when the great prophet introduces Christ’s suffering and glory with the words, “Behold my Servant” in Isaiah 52:13. He then goes on to present Jesus as the Lamb of God in Isaiah 53. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus was announced by John the Baptist, the last of the line of Old Testament prophets, as “The Lamb of God” (John 1:29). After John the Baptist baptised Jesus, God the Father proclaimed, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). But the Chosen One was rejected and crucified. Peter had denied Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion. Yet restored and empowered by the Saviour and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Peter confronts the vast crowd in the Temple with their rejection of the Son of God,

But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses (Acts 3:14-15).

In his epistle, Peter is explaining that by faith we came to Jesus, the risen and glorified Saviour, the “living stone.” There is nothing as inanimate as stone. Christ went into death and rose triumphantly from it. He is “the resurrection and the life”, the Son of the Living God. Our life is derived from Him. He took us out of spiritual death and into life eternal. He is the living stone upon which His Church, a “spiritual house”, is being built. And we “as living stones” sharing life in Him are being formed into His glorious Church.

Peter's teaching blends perfectly with Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:4-7:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

And also in verses 19-22:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Peter, the apostle to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, unitedly convey the richness of God's mercy, the greatness of God's love and the depth of God's grace displayed in the rejection and death of His Son and the glorious outcomes of His resurrection and ascension in the formation of the Church - a “chosen generation.”

Later, in Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul looks forward to the day when the Church of Christ will be displayed:

Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Christ's chosen generation

Our key verse begins with the words, “But you are a chosen generation.” Peter writes about being chosen within the context of a generation. In our thinking, a generation is not a very long period. It can be embraced within the context of family generations. These are periods of the lives of grandparents, parents, and children. Longer generations can be linked to periods like the Elizabethan Age or the Tudor Era. The concept can also extend to the social characteristics of empires that last centuries. Sometimes it's linked to features of cultural changes - “a child of the sixties.” But all these views are limited by time.

The question is asked about Christ in Isaiah 53, “Who shall declare His generation?”

He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken (v. 8).

The Son of God gives the answer to this question in John 12:23-24:

The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.

The Saviour would declare His generation. This declaration would begin at Pentecost and extend to the present time, until Christ returns to bring the whole generation of His people into the fullness of their salvation in the Father's house (John 14:1-6).

It is a chosen generation that began in time and extends into eternity. Jesus explains this in the simplest terms in John 10:27-30:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.

The phrase "chosen generation" emphasizes Christ's redemptive work and its consequences. Our life is derived from our Saviour, who says, "I give them eternal life." Every person included in this vast generation is only included because we individually believed in "the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

God established a "chosen generation", made from those redeemed by the blood of Christ, "Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9) to be an eternal testimony to the glory of His grace through His Son.

Now let us move on to -

A Royal Priesthood

Our key verse is 1 Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

The Christian priesthood consists of all believers. It is not an exclusive group like the Aaronic priesthood in the Old Testament. Christ is our High Priest, and every believer in Him is part of a kingdom of priests. The concept of a Kingdom of Priests was expressed at Mount Sinai in the Book of Exodus when God instructed Moses to tell the children of Israel,

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6).

We have already seen through the history of Israel the gradual spiritual descent which culminated in the rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah. Yet in that terrible darkness, the love of God was seen in all its brightness. The Saviour died, rose from the grave, and ascended in glory into

heaven. The Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, and the Church was born. We could spend a considerable amount of time examining the various features of the Church. Today, we reflect on the Church as a Chosen Generation and as a Royal Priesthood.

As we have seen, the emphasis of “a chosen generation” focuses on what God, through Christ, did to form a company to witness eternally to His love, mercy, and grace.

Now we’ll consider Peter’s presentation of our priesthood. John, in the opening chapter of Revelation, writes,

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings [a kingdom, margin] and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (vv. 5-6).

This priesthood is fulfilled in two ways. The first way is described by Peter earlier in verse 5 of our chapter:

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 9:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

W. E. Vine associates the “Holy Priesthood” with the offering of spiritual sacrifices and a “Royal Priesthood” with witnessing to the Lord’s glorious Person.

The spiritual sacrifices of the Holy Priesthood are described in Hebrews 13:15-16:

By him therefore let us offer [the] sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, [the] fruit of [the] lips confessing his name. But of doing good and communicating [of your substance] be not forgetful, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Darby Translation).

The “sacrifice of praise” comes from our hearts and is expressed with our lips (i.e. in our words). A key part of this expression is in song. It is good to be able to sing together. Singing declares our oneness in Christ, uniting our hearts and voices in expressions of praise, worship, and thankfulness. Hymns are remarkable for their ability to focus our hearts on a single theme of worship or encompass multiple themes within a few verses. They demonstrate the Holy Spirit’s ministry of glorifying the Person of Christ.

The first mention of singing a hymn in the New Testament follows the institution of the Lord’s Supper. “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). This has been linked to the Hallel Psalms, Psalms 113-118 and 136 sung at the Passover. (Hallel is Hebrew for “praise”). It is extraordinary that the Lord led singing which expressed praise and thanksgiving before enduring the sufferings of Calvary and dying as the Saviour of the world.

In Acts 16, we find Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God in prison at the darkest hour of the night. The other prisoners listened to them. Their joyful singing, while enduring painful suffering, prefaced the salvation of the Philippian jailer. Paul later writes of the joy of singing in

Ephesians 5:19-26: “singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”; and in Colossians 3:16, he adds, “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (ESV). Singing is always used of praise to God. And it is the melody of our hearts that God treasures. The fact that we sing words written by another does not diminish the praise that is offered. The Holy Spirit uses the words of one child of God so that many of His children can express praise and worship from hearts overflowing with gratitude. The words of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs articulate our spiritual response to the love and grace of God.

I have been in meetings where the depth of feeling generated by the words of a hymn has made it challenging to complete the spiritual sentiment expressed. At such moments, as Mary illustrates when she anointed the feet of Jesus with the very costly oil of spikenard in John 12 and the house was filled with its beautiful fragrance, so the spiritual fragrance of true worship is released from our hearts. This not only fills the house but also ascends to heaven. Our singing looks on to the day when, no longer hindered by wandering minds, stumbling words, or incomplete or inadequate thoughts, we shall perfectly “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

The spiritual sacrifices of the Holy Priesthood described in Hebrews 13:15-16 also include doing good and sacrificially using what we have for God

But of doing good and communicating [of your substance] be not forgetful, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

The emphasis of these sacrifices is not simply the outward actions, but the worshipful response of the heart and spirit to God which generates those actions. God always looks at the heart and is always seeking to have our relationship with Him expressed. It is a response of love. Paul lists the great sacrificial actions we can perform at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 13 but closes the passage with the words, “but have not love, it profits me nothing” (v. 3). Sacrificial lives emerge from the hearts of people who know they are loved by God and love in response: “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

As I have said, there are two aspects to priesthood. The first aspect involves entering God’s presence to worship and intercede. The second aspect is the emergence from God’s presence to represent and serve Him among His people and in the world generally. The Aaronic priesthood was intended to fulfil this role in Israel in the Old Testament. It failed terribly. The New Testament records the darkness and evil that were endemic among the High Priests and chief priests, which led their Messiah to Calvary.

But the Saviour who died for us is now our Great High Priest who lives for us. In Hebrews 5:6, Christ is called “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek was both a king, the king of Salem, and the priest of the Most High God (Hebrews 7:1). He blessed Abraham after his defeat of the kings in Genesis 14. Melchizedek is called “king of righteousness” and “king of peace” and is described in Hebrews 7:3 as “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.” There is no argument about Melchizedek portraying the Person of Christ as our Great High Priest whose heavenly priesthood excelled the Aaronic priesthood on earth. There is a royal connection. Christ is king, “King of kings and Lord of lords”, and the Great High Priest. Hebrews goes on to highlight the features of Christ’s heavenly priesthood. He is a merciful and faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17), a heavenly High Priest (Hebrews 3:1), a compassionate High Priest (Hebrews 4:15), a glorified High Priest (Hebrews 5:5), a holy High Priest (Hebrews 7:26), a perfect High Priest (Hebrews 7:28), a majestic High Priest (Hebrews 8:1) and an eternal High Priest (Hebrews 9:11).

We are members of the Kingdom of Priests. It is a Holy and Royal priesthood. We demonstrate the Royal Priesthood through our allegiance and subjection to Christ's authority and the reflection of His gracious character in bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Like our Saviour, we are to be merciful, faithful, compassionate, and holy. We draw our strength from our Great High Priest who is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

These priestly services are not mystical but conveyed in our fellowship as the people of God and in our individual lives. Our worship and sacrificial living are how we demonstrate the life we have in Christ. The simplicity of prayer for others witnesses to the intercession of our Great High Priest. Our care for one another and others witnesses to our Great High Priest's love and compassion. We are not distinguished by the special clothes the biblical priests wore but by being "clothed with humility." We should be identified as those who have "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Pairs in Peter: Chosen race, royal Priesthood. Talk number T1435.

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