

A Nation of Priests

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

If you are new or visiting with us, welcome. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is a way of saying that God has something to say to everyone in his word, which is why we come back week after week to hear from God.

If you've been with us, you know that we're in the book of 1 Peter, and the book of 1 Peter is a letter. It's a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes it to Christians who are living in the first century in what is now modern-day Turkey, and these Christians are in distress, and so Peter writes to them, and they're in distress because they are feeling out of place in the world because they're Christians, and they're facing opposition from the world as Christians.

Peter writes to give them both encouragement and instruction. He writes to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. Jesus is worth living and loving for, and Jesus is worth suffering and dying for.

He also writes to instruct them that they would know how to live in the world as Christians, and they would know how to respond when living as Christians leads to opposition from the world.

[1 : 3 3] Last week, we talked about the importance of community, that we're not just chosen as God's people, as we saw at the very beginning of chapter 1 as individuals, but we are chosen as a group, that we're meant to belong and be together.

We had the image of the stones that are built together into a spiritual house in verses 4 through 9, 4 through 8. Now we turn again. Peter's going to continue to talk about God's people as a group.

He's going to cement even more what we've discussed last week, and so we're going to continue to ask the questions about God's people that we looked at previously, and one of the questions is this. Why does God have a people?

What is the purpose or mission of God's people? What's the relationship of God's people to the world around them?

And how is it that God's people should act as they encounter that world, especially when, as Peter's readers are experiencing opposition, they experience opposition? And so it's with those questions that we come to 1 Peter 2, starting at verse 9.

[2 : 3 6] You can follow along with me in your worship guide. You can find it on your phone. You can open it up in your Bible. But remember, as we come, we're coming to God's Word, and God tells us that His Word, unlike grass which withers, and unlike flowers which fade, will last forever.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 9. Verse 11.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you speak to us, you communicate with us.

You're not a distant father, but you're a father who's close, who communicates and teaches and instructs His children. And so we ask simply that you would send your Holy Spirit this morning to do that, that you would instruct us and teach us, that you would unstop our ears and open our eyes and soften our hearts and clear our minds, that we would be able to see and hear and know and believe and understand everything that is written about you.

[4 : 32] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I have mentioned to you all before that I grew up right outside Washington, D.C., and my parents made it a priority to try to be tourists in the place that we lived, and so there were countless times that we went into the city.

And one of the things that we started doing near the end of my time at home, I think it probably wasn't until I was in high school, was we would head into National Cathedral, which is the large cathedral in Washington, D.C., for their Christmas Eve service.

We had bounced around for a while as a family trying to find the right spot to be at Christmas Eve, because our church didn't have one. And if you drive to the National Cathedral, if you're familiar with Washington, D.C., you know it's hard to get there without going along Massachusetts Avenue.

And Massachusetts Avenue is actually known, has a nickname, it's called Embassy Row, because as you go along on both sides, it's lined with different embassies from different countries, and you can see because they have the country's flags hanging outside.

And so you'll drive along and you might see the Indian Embassy, or the Embassy for Greece, or the Embassy for Ireland. This is not just true of Washington, D.C., we actually have some embassies in Denver.

[5 : 48] It turns out that Colorado can have nice things. Not just 14ers, and so we have the Canadian Embassy. We have an Irish Embassy. Because these places are places where people can go and have that country represented.

If you have business you need to do with that country, if you're a citizen of that country, that's your hot spot. That's the place where they fly that flag above every other. Peter's been telling his people, the recipients of this, about belonging to God and being not just individuals but a group, and he begins here in verse 9 to use all kinds of different language, including national language.

He tells them, You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. What Peter is telling them here is radical. They are a new group of people, a different race, a different kind of people, because they belong to God and they're Christians.

And not only that, as they live in this world and they feel marginalized, they are actually their own nation. That is how serious God thinks of his people, how seriously he thinks of his people and the reality in which they belong to him.

Their identity belonging to him as a people is so strong that they can think of themselves as their own nation with their own allegiances and loyalties and practices and laws. They're their own race.

[7 : 07] That loyalty takes place above maybe the birth race that they have. They belong to God's people before they belong to any other people. And really, we could spend a sermon on each one of these descriptions.

I think there's four here. Race, priesthood, nation, people. These are overlapping categories. And Peter is telling them again what we saw last week, that they are part of a countercultural community that exists in the world chosen by God with loyalty to God.

They have countercultural practices and ways of living. And their loyalties are greater and different than any of the other loyalties that they face.

If you walk just a few blocks from here, you'll go by Otero Elementary School, which is just that way. And Otero has a flagpole like many schools do. And it has two flags on it.

It has the American flag and it has the Colorado flag. Now, which of those flags is the flag on top? It's the American flag.

[8 : 11] Peter is telling these people in Asia Minor that their flag as Christians flies higher than any other flag. It is a loyalty that is greater for them than any other loyalty.

And we're going to talk about that next week, how that affects the Christian's relationship with the government and the state. But remember that the people receiving this letter are people who feel at times harassed and helpless.

They're out of place in the world that they live geographically. They don't necessarily belong to the nation that they're in. And even if they do, they claim a different and higher loyalty.

They have different practices. Peter encourages them that when it comes to God, they belong to his nation. And they're a part of his people.

They're a priesthood and a nation. They're holy. They've been set apart. And so just what was said singularly about individuals, of course it was in the plural in the book, but I applied it to you all as individuals in chapter one.

[9 : 23] Now Peter continues to apply to groups. That God doesn't just have single people, but he has a people. We talked about the importance of this people last week.

And because of the image of the stones in the building, I did not have time to focus as much on the image of the priesthood. And I told you last week that we would talk about it this week, and I gave you a little teaser.

And lo and behold, it shows up here in verse nine. So to review, in verses four and five, we're told not only are we living stones, but we are a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

And as we talked about last week, that's the obedience and praise that believers give to God in their lives. Peter repeats that here in verse nine, telling them that they are a royal priesthood.

Now if you are familiar with the Old Testament, you know that the priests served in the temple, and they did all sorts of things. They taught people God's word.

[10 : 24] They made sacrifices on behalf of the people. And they were set apart from the rest of the people. There was something about them that was different and special. They were called to a higher standard of behavior and living.

Now some of you remember the old style SATs, where you had the analogies, you know, cat is to dog as, I won't finish that one.

But Peter is using an analogy here about the priesthood. He is telling them, as the priesthood operated towards Israel in the Old Testament, now you, as a whole nation, operate towards the world.

Whatever the priesthood was supposed to do for Israel, you now, as New Testament believers, all of you are priests, and you interact in that way with the world. In other words, you represent God to the world.

And, in a sense, you represent the world to God. You represent God to the world, and you also represent the world to God.

[11 : 39] That's what priests did. They helped people know God. They helped people have a relationship with God. They taught people about God's ways.

If there was a sermon that was given in the Old Testament, there was teaching about God's law, the chances are it would have been given by a priest. They would have helped people know God and what the truth about Him was.

Embassies, they don't just exist to exist, but they have a purpose. They represent that nation to another place. And, they represent people from that foreign place back to their nation.

Now, living outside of D.C., we had easy access to embassies, and that wasn't necessarily helpful for us because we weren't traveling a lot as a family internationally, really not at all. But, there came a time after my grandfather died that my grandmother, my dad's mother, took a lot of trips and traveling for a period of time, and there were points in nations where she had to get permission, receive permission to travel to them.

And so, she would drive up from North Carolina to our home in Southern Maryland, and then she would drive in to Washington, D.C. to visit the embassy so that she could turn in her application to visit a specific country.

[13 : 00] And so, in that sense, the embassy represented her. And, the embassy also represented their country to us. I think at one point, she went to the Indian embassy. So, they represented her to India, and they represented India to her.

Why do God's people exist? Why does God have a people? God has a people so that he would be known in the entire world.

that he would have an embassy in this world. And he has a people to represent him to that world.

And in a sense, those people also represent the world to God. And so, as we represent God to the world, we're making God known to the people around us in our community.

You might be wondering, how is it that we represent the world to God? Right? People have to have a direct relationship with God through Jesus. We can't have a relationship for them.

[14 : 03] But, think about this. Abraham, as one man has pointed out, prayed on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. when we pray to God on behalf of the people around us and on behalf of the nations around us and the nation in which we live, we are serving as priests representing the world to God.

And when we tell the people around us about God's goodness and his justice and his mercy and his love, and when we live it out in our lives, we are representing God to the world. And so, being a priesthood here is not just some fancy religious language.

It's not an image of people who hide in prayer closets all day and can never seem to be found anywhere except a Bible study. Instead, it is people who are living out God's purposes in the world and making him known in the same way that priests in the Old Testament made sure God's people knew about him.

How is it that we serve as priests to the world? Peter gives us two ways about how we help other people to know God.

First, he gives us a little bit of a mission statement here in verse 9. Okay, we're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. Why? That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[15 : 48] God has chosen us as his people that we would praise him and that the world would see and hear. God has chosen us as his people.

God has a people so that the entire world would be filled with his praise. and not just praise in general but praise about the fact that he's called us out of darkness into his marvelous light proclaiming his excellencies.

Proclaiming God's excellencies is talking about his great acts of redemption, what he has done for us and for the world and so we're proclaiming that he's the creator. He's the one who's made the heavens and the earth. We're also proclaiming that he's our redeemer.

He's the one who comes and offers to restore us and the world from the effects of sin through the death of his son. And we're proclaiming the effects of that. He's called us out of darkness into light.

We are not just people who have had the penalty of sin removed from us but we experience the freedom of walking without the shame and guilt that would otherwise cover us because of our sin.

[16 : 53] God has a people in this world to proclaim his goodness into that world. And so that's the first way that we're priests.

We're priests as we praise God. We represent God to the world as we worship right here on Sunday morning October 20th. We are right now serving as priests as we sing praises to God.

And we're also serving as priests as we live out our lives as people who belong to God and tell others around us about the truth of God. We're telling them what's in verse 10 once we were not a people but now we are God's people because we've received mercy.

Peter does not just tell them however that they serve as priests by praising God. Now that would be great right if the Christian life you know we come to confess Christ and we decide all that means is we just show up on Sunday mornings and sing praises and we can go and just nothing else needs to change.

We'll just go and live our lives the way they were before but church is a great place to be on Sunday morning to be with other people and kind of to feel uplifted and excited and sometimes the music is good and we really like it but sometimes it's not our favorite song but that's really what it means to be a Christian.

[18 : 29] Certainly not less than that but Peter tells us here that it is so much more than that. He moves on from praise to talk about not just our identity as chosen by God or our people as worshipers but hear about our behavior.

Verse 11 In other words it's not just our praise that brings other people to know God it is also our behavior God means for our obedience to him our holiness our set apartness to cause people to stop and pay attention to notice that there is something different that our holiness would lead people to see the goodness of God as we live lives where we value life rather than death people would see the beauty of that as we live lives where we value truth over falsehood others would see how rare that is in this world as we live lives where we honor our vows and our commitments people would see the character of God as people watch us caring for the vulnerable rather than them being downtrodden they would wonder what it is that makes that possible as people are around us and they notice that we're able to enjoy each other and laugh and have fun without substance abuse they will question how are those people able to do that verse 12 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 when we use our sexuality to build other people up rather than to use them and exploit them people will see the goodness of God and some of them will glorify God on the day of visitation now there's a catch here sounds good right people live great lives people are drawn to God through that except verse 11 and 12 we're still sojourners and exiles verse 11 so we're still living as people who feel out of place in this world even more than that verse 12 why are we keeping our conduct honorable why are God's people putting off sin and putting on righteousness well what's going to happen when you live as a sojourner in an exile is that people are going to speak against you as evildoers and so there's a dual reality here on the one hand people are speaking poorly about these

Christians on the other hand they can't help but see their good works now I've told you in the past that a lot of the opposition that people face for being Christians is something that happens in other parts of the world and Nancy Carlson mentioned that this morning we see opposition perhaps in places like Africa or the global south and yet we also see this dual dynamic here in the United States the speaking against its evildoers and also seeing good deeds I received a text this week from a friend of mine in seminary telling me about another friend and one of my friends went to work after he graduated at a church in Columbia Missouri and that church showed up in the news this week so and this is very recent so last Sunday one of the pastors of this church not my friend but a different pastor and this is a Presbyterian church by the way or not our denomination but a sister denomination the pastor stood up and gave a message from Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 and he preached what it is and how we think as Christians about gender dysphoria so he's talking about how we think about our identity as men and women the news media got a hold of this and very quickly there was an outcry in the city of Columbia, Missouri so there were petitions that were being signed to boycott this church now of course the people boycotting never went to the church so they had to find a different way to boycott the church they decided to boycott businesses that were associated with the church and this is ongoing right now this article just came out on Friday as you read it though you might be wondering what are these businesses that are associated with the church churches don't run businesses we don't run a business most churches aren't involved in business as you read along in the article you discover it's not businesses this church has been giving away their money their church's money to non-profits in the city and so this petition is begging these non-profits to no longer receive the church's money the church also this appears in the article this is not an article written by Christians this church also offers their building for free to an arts program there in the city this arts program is now under pressure so they have pulled out and they will no longer be holding their art display for free and this church this is a large church by the way the church's large facility the article mentions that they no longer have a place to hold their art exhibit which is coming up very soon verse 12 keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers this church is being spoken against as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation what is this church doing they are seeking the flourishing of this community they're offering their building for people in the community to use to promote beauty and art they're encouraging non-profits in the city that need financial support and I can't help but hope and wonder that as people read that article they may tilt their heads a little bit so we're saying no the church can't give money to the non-profits in our city and we're saying no they can't host art galleries for free in their large building that now maybe this non-profit is going to have to pay to rent a building

I'm confident that some people are going to encounter that and of course they're going to continue to speak against them I'm also confident that some people are going to see that article and realize this church is doing good works and some people may be drawn to see their good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation in other words some people may come to faith in Christ because of the faithfulness of this church and when Jesus returns in his second coming to the earth because of that they will give glory to him oh and by the way if you go onto this church's website of course the first thing that shows up is a question and answer about last week's sermon because this is just blowing them up right now if you scroll over a couple other things you'll see the new initiative that they just completed to pay off medical debt for people in poverty in their city and so this church just donated \$430,000 it's a very large church to pay off emergency room bills for people who would not otherwise be able to pay them now I tell you this not to say look at these great Christians and all the good they're doing but to say here's an example of this dual reality on the one hand this church is being slandered and spoken against in the media in their local city but they're first Peter kind of people they're a first Peter church and so people can't help but also see their good deeds we are priests

God's priests to the nations we are his embassy to let people know what is true about him not just in our praise verse 9 proclaiming his excellencies but also in our behavior verses 11 and 12 we represent God not just by what we say but also by what we do and when we're living the lives that God calls us to in this world those around us cannot help but see and some of them will give glory to God as a result John Stott says this evangelism that is declaring God's praises and his good news of salvation in Jesus evangelism without good works lacks credibility good works without evangelism lacks intelligibility evangelism without good works lacks credibility good works without evangelism lacks intelligibility why does God have a people he has a people to serve as priests helping others to know him and bringing those people to know him as well and why do they do it we saw last week that we are stones founded on the stone so what's true of Jesus is true of us we are priests and Hebrews chapter 4 tells us that Jesus is our great high priest which means that Jesus is the one ultimately who represents us to God and so we're able to proclaim his goodness in the world not because of what we've done right this church is not claiming its goodness in fact if you read on their website about what they've done to pay off the debt they explain the reason they're paying off these debts is because Jesus paid off their debt they're serving the community around them in mercy because they know the mercy that they've received through Jesus and so as we act as a chosen race and a royal priesthood and a holy nation we do it not because we're the great priests but because we follow the great priest and Jesus as our great high priest is both a priest and a sacrifice as a sacrifice he suffered the death and punishment that we deserve and he also lived the life that we couldn't live and so he took the pain and penalty of sin and now he's our priest he represents us before God that's why we pray in Jesus name at the end of our prayers because we know that Jesus is the only one who gives us standing with God he has to represent us and so we also represent him to the world proclaiming and living out the goodness and mercy of God so why does

[30 : 00] God have a people God has a people to represent him and make him known in this world that is why God has chosen you and that's why God has chosen his church how do we serve as God's priests in this world we do it in two ways we glorify God and we sing his praises we do it with our words and we also live faithful and holy lives so that when others speak against us they will see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation we do it with our words and we also do it with our actions and we do all of this as priests to the world around us because Jesus is our great high priest and he as we represent him he represents us to God and so that's why we follow him and love him and obey him and proclaim his greatness throughout the world please pray with me dear father in heaven we thank you that you have sent your son as our great priest and that you also give us the privilege of serving as your priests in this world knowing you and also making you known we ask that you would encourage us with that and challenge us that our lives would be ones where we don't just praise you but we also honor you in the way we act and that we would not just honor you in the way that we act but we would also praise you we don't deserve any of these things and so we don't ask for them on our own but we know that Jesus represents us to you and so we ask them in his name amen