

A People for God's Own Possession

SERMON

By

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TEXT: 1 Peter 2:9-12

PROP: Because we are the people of God by his grace our whole lives should demonstrate to the society in which we live, the moral Excellencies of God.

1 Peter 2:9–12 (ESV) — **9** 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. **10** 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. **11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **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.

Hosea 1:1–10 (ESV) — **1** The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beerai, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. **2** When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." **3** So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. **4** And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. **5** And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." **6** She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. **7** But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." **8** When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. **9** And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God." **10** Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

We will recall that Peter addresses his epistle to the people of God that he has chosen and caused to be born again to a living hope. Many equate conversion with repentance, for example, *The Shaw Pocket Bible Handbook* defines conversion as follows:

"The decisive act in which a sinner turns away from sin in genuine repentance and accepts the salvation that Christ offers. The imagery in conversion is that of turning. A person is going along a road and realizes that he or she is on the wrong track. They will never reach the destination if they continue in that direction. So the person "turns," or "is converted." He or she ceases to go in the wrong direction and begins going in the right one. Conversion changes the direction of one's course of life from the wrong way to the right way, the way that God wants."

Conversion according to this definition is something we do for ourselves. We turn away from our sin. That is to say we repent. However, Peter tells us that God causes us to be converted, to be born again,

1 Peter 1:3 (ESV) — 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Therefore, conversion is not an act of our will but an act of God. Repentance unto life is itself a saving grace because we will not turn away from sin apart from conversion, apart from God's causing us to be born again. The result of conversion is a dramatic change in our presuppositions and the God that we worship. Instead of worshipping a god that is the product of our imagination we worship YAHWEH the God of the Bible. The worship of YAHWEH and his Messiah is only seen in those whom God has been pleased to bring to himself by grace. The religion of YAHWEH is a revealed religion whereas all other religions are products of human imagination. In addition, conversion brings about a profound change in our system of ethics. We no longer believe that truth is relative and situation dependent but we believe that God is truth and that his Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Having been converted by the grace of God, we begin to struggle against sin. We become engaged in moral warfare. The life of the believer is a constant struggle against sin as defined by law of God which is absolute truth even as God himself is absolute truth. Now the means of grace are precious to us and their use produces spiritual growth. Peter notes that people who are converted have a growing desire for the pure spiritual milk of the word of God which inevitably issues in spiritual growth. There is obviously a great difference between the chosen people of God and the world of unbelief in which we live.

The Lord Jesus is said here to be a choice and precious cornerstone. The cornerstone of a building is prominently displayed and all can see it. So Christ is openly displayed, as it were, for all to see. The life and death of God's Messiah was not hidden in a small dark interior corner but as the gospel is preached to every tribe and tongue the cornerstone of Zion becomes known to all mankind. To those whom God causes to be born again he is chosen and precious, but to those who do not believe we read,

1 Peter 2:7–8 (ESV) — 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” **8** and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Those who are not converted inevitably stumble at the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot and will not understand the things of the Spirit of God and Jesus the Messiah is always folly to them. Apart from conversion no one can understand the mind of the Lord but as Paul tells us, “We have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:16) To the unconverted, the preaching of Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, “But,” Peter says,

1 Peter 2:9–10 (ESV) — 9 -- 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. **10** 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.

The moral excellencies of God are clearly seen in these profound expressions of the mercies of God to his people making them ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.’ All this is done for the specific reason that we who have received these mercies would proclaim the **excellencies** of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. That is to say, the aim of all God's sovereign grace is that those upon whom he has set such love should show God to the world for what he really is.

9 Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς·

(Virtue, goodness, excellence, manifestation of power)

The English Standard Version, instead of "praises" reads "*excellencies*", but even that falls short of expressing the meaning of this unusual word in the original Greek text. The usual meaning of the word is expressed in English by **virtue, or absolute moral purity**. When it applies to God it refers to the radiant excellence and glory of his character which we can only understand by analogy. Our concept of God's moral excellence and glory is but a shadow of what it really is. How is it possible for sinful people as we are, even though we have been called out of the darkness of irrational humanism, to understand the marvelous light of God? We read,

Isaiah 43:20–21 (ESV) — 20 The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, **21** the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

21 עִם־זֶן יִצְרָתִי לִי תְהִלָּתִי יִסְפְּרוּ:

(Speak positively about the moral excellence of God. Renown.)

It is on the strength of this verse that some have used the word "praises" to translate the Greek word Peter uses here in our text, but even so the text does not mean merely that the audible praise of God should be on the lips of God's people but that their whole lives should demonstrate the moral excellencies of God to the society in which they live.

Instead of moral excellence we are prone to show the world about us a life style that falls far short of what it should be. Too often we are like unfaithful Israel of old to whom God sent the prophet Hosea. A prophet of the Lord who lived during the reign of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah, and Jeroboam II of Israel, Hosea was instructed by God to marry a prostitute and to take some children into his home who were born to prostitutes and therefore illegitimate. This was not a sinful thing to do and we must remember that God never instructs his people to do evil. He was instructed to name his legitimate children (born to him by Gomer), Jezreel, Lo Ruchamah, and Lo Ammi; strange names indeed, at least to us. God's reasons for this turned on the fact that Israel was committing flagrant idolatry and God wished to punish the household of Jehu for bloodshed in Jezreel.

The marriage which Hosea was to contract was simply intended to symbolize the relation already existing between Israel and the LORD. Israel as a nation was committing spiritual adultery and God very pointedly shows them through this means, the grossness of their sin. We may say, "well that was a long time ago, that was a theocracy, that was Israel." Then again we may say, "the people of the United States of America don't make idols!" We seldom if ever see an idol of wood or stone or gold here in this country; other countries perhaps but not this one. But come to think of it, isn't all sin really a form of idolatry? When we live according to laws that are not God's laws aren't we in effect worshipping another God? Is God really less pleased with the idolatry of our own nation than He was with Israel's idolatry? I think we can readily appreciate the grossness of our own sin as we consider just what it was that Hosea's marriage to Gomer symbolized but that is by no means all there is to this very graphic object lesson.

God gave Hosea certain reasons why He wanted him to marry Gomer and to name his children in the way He did. The reason given for Hosea's marriage to a prostitute was "the land commits flagrant harlotry forsaking THE LORD." For naming his first child Jezreel the reason was the punishment of the household of Jehu for the bloodshed in Jezreel. For Lo Ruchamah, "I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I should ever forgive them." And for Lo Ammi, "for you are not My people, and I am not your God." We can see immediately that God does not overlook sin and the judgments comprehended in these names are fearsome indeed! How dreadful that God would never forgive someone or that He would declare that He was not their God! Our sin is a very serious matter and we should not take the message of God's prophet lightly.

What was Jehu's problem? Why such a punishment on his household? Jezreel was a beautiful valley allotted by Joshua to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. The only problem with it was that its inhabitants had chariots of iron. It would require great effort to conquer the Canaanites that lived there. Later on, kings like Ahab established their palaces there. Ahab's palace, in particular lay next to the property of Naboth and Ahab coveted this property to the extent that Naboth was murdered to get it. Ahab proved to be the most immoral king Israel ever had and his wife Jezebel was no better. She was actually engaged in witchcraft and the open worship of the devil.

Some years later Jehu was anointed king and directly commissioned by God to destroy the house of Ahab. He did this with some relish as we will recall, culminating in the grisly death of Ahab's wife Jezebel. Jehu also killed king Joram of Israel and king Ahaziah of Judah. After that he arranged for the heads of the seventy sons of Ahab to be sent to him in a basket. He killed all the great men who ruled with Ahab and all Ahab's acquaintances and his priests. Then he proceeded to dispatch the forty two relatives of king Ahaziah. Finally he arranged to get all the priests of Baal into their temple at the same time, closed the doors and set upon them with eighty soldiers killing them all. We read that Jehu then broke down the sacred pillar of Baal, tore down the house of Baal and turned it into a public toilet.

Remember that God commissioned Jehu to do this and said to Jehu,

2 Kings 10:30–31 (ESV) — 30 And the Lord said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." **31** But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin.

If Jehu did well in carrying out the command of the Lord what was his problem? We see that he was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord the God of Israel with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin. He obeyed God up to a point but he had the wrong motives for slaughtering the house of Ahab. Thus, as Calvin writes, "It was a crime so far as Jehu was concerned but with God it was a righteous vengeance." Do we do that sort of thing? Do we obey God imperfectly, up to a point, with the wrong motives? The answer of course is yes. And God does not overlook our sin.

The names of the other children of Hosea also speak to this truth. Lo Ruchamah means in English "no mercy" and Lo Ammi means "not My people." The Holy One of Israel demands perfection. He states, "Be holy for I am Holy" (Leviticus 20:7). But we are not holy and we are by nature imperfect in all that we do. **How then shall we live?** What can be done to avert the wrath of God? With Isaiah can we see THE LORD sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Can we see the angels about Him calling to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is THE LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). Do the foundations of our hearts tremble at the voice of Him who calls out and will we say as Isaiah did, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, THE LORD of Hosts" (Isaiah 6:5)?

"But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Therein lays the answer to the great dilemma of mankind. Without God's sovereign mercy we would all perish. We who deserve the wrath of God for our sin deserve to be Lo Ruchamah, without mercy but praise God He grants mercy through His beloved Son. We who deserve to be Lo Ammi, not my people, are granted the adoption of sons through Christ.

The New Testament makes use of this passage in Hosea and if it were not in holy writ it would be difficult to believe that it could be true. Speaking of those who have come to Christ as a living stone we are choice and precious in the sight of God. Peter writes,

1 Peter 2:10 (ESV) — 10 Once you were not a people (Lo Ammi), but now you are God's people (Ammi); once you had not received mercy (Lo Ruchamah), but now you have received mercy (Ruchamah).

What is impossible to us as human beings, God has granted through His dear Son. All the imperfections of His people have been nailed to the cross in Christ. Certainly we are ruined and sinful but we can escape God's wrath if we would but believe on Jesus as LORD (YAHWEH) and confess with the mouth that God has raised

Him from the dead. Whoever will call upon the name of THE LORD (YAHWEH) will be saved.

The Israel that sinned so grievously against God was a relatively small nation. Concerning Israel Moses writes, "THE LORD did not set His love on you nor chose you because you were more in number than any of the people, for you were the fewest of all people" (Deuteronomy 7:7). Yet Hosea writes that those who are called "my people" will be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered. The salvation of God is powerful indeed and His church which is called into being by His grace will not be a trivial or inconsequential institution. We do not look forward, as the people of God, to annihilation. If the success of God's church depended on the zeal of the Jehu's of this earth it would indeed look forward to failure. What a dismal picture is painted for us by Hosea of the ability of mankind to be zealous for the LORD. But the success of the people of God does not depend on their own abilities. The Lord says,

Hosea 1:7 (ESV) — 7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by THE LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

Often the Scripture speaks of the great power yet to be realized in the Savior's Church because salvation is of Lord. This amazing sovereign mercy of God as comprehended in Hosea's object lesson is actually adduced not once but twice in the New Testament. The apostle Paul, in Romans 9, speaks of the sovereign God who endures with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

Romans 9:23–26 (ESV) — 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— **24** even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? **25** As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people (Lo Ammi) I will call 'my people,' (Ammi) and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" **26** "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' (Lo Ammi) there they will be called 'sons of the living God.' "

I call you to witness this day, my friends. God will not overlook our sins and our sins are great. There is no way that we deserve of heaven. Were it not for the exceeding great mercy of God in Christ, our sins would not be forgiven forever. What would that mean? God punishes unrepentant sinners in hell forever and who are you to find fault with God for this? We deserve nothing yet God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. Will you not repent from your sins this day and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you seriously consider the condition of your

own heart before God? Can you not see that like Israel your heart and your life in the eyes of God is an ugly, adulterous, idolatrous mess?

To those of us who have come to Christ for forgiveness I say with Peter,

1 Peter 2:11–12 (ESV) — **11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **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.

How then shall we live? We shall live only through faith in Him who is the way and the truth and the life. We who were once Lo Ammi, not My people, but who are now Ammi, My people, are to live a life that proclaims the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. May God give grace to us all to repent from sin and to live pleasing to Him with whom we have to do.