

June 21, 2020

A Chosen Race

Grace mercy and peace be to you from God our father and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, Amen. It is the third Sunday in Pentecost we have seen Peter and the disciples filled with power of the Holy Spirit we have seen them speaking and a variety of languages we have seen them being mocked as uneducated Galileans, and as being drunk. We have seen Peter laying down the gospel with Christ as the cornerstone; and laying down the law telling the people you crucified Jesus. And we've seen the people responding and saying, 'brothers what must we do?' Peter's response was 'repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit.' And we saw how the people began to then live in unity. We're going to take it yet another step; but to do so we have to go back to the Old Testament. We have to look at something that may cause you a little bit of angst. It may be a little bit unnerving because in this day and age there's a lot being said about race and there is one undeniable fact coming from the Bible. We find it next to this chapter 19 that God has a chosen race. So, buckle up here we go.

Why do I say God has a chosen race? Well I say it because God says it. When we go to the Old Testament to exodus chapter 19, we find the children of Israel at Mount Sinai. What happened to get them to Mount Sinai? God delivered them. In the chapters before, you see God taking on the sole world power Egypt and bringing Egypt to its knees. You see God doing this with 10 miraculous and powerful plagues. You see God delivering the children of Israel through the Red Sea by parting the waters, letting them walk through on dry ground, then bogging down pharaoh's Chariots in the mud and having the water collapse on them and wiping out the Egyptian army. You see God providing them with water by changing the bitter water at Marrow to sweet. You see God providing them with manna and quail to eat. You see God guiding them and directing them as he gives them a pillar of cloud that moves before them during the day and a pillar of fire at night. We see Him taking them to Mount Sinai and there they had to prepare, purify themselves to meet God and they met God. God came down on Mount Sinai and the smoke from it went up like from a cauldron or from like a steel mill and God spoke directly to the people giving them the 10 commandments; but also establishing with them and only

them, His covenant. A covenant is again a two-way agreement. It is oftentimes written in an if/then statement. It begins this covenant like this God says to the people: if you obey my voice and keep my commandment. Two parts- obey God's word keep His commandment. If you do that, children of Israel descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If you do that then you shall be. You shall be what? My treasured possession among all the peoples. Now there are some people that would say, 'well that's quite a bold statement. Who is God to say that?' Well very simply, He follows it up with, 'for all the earth is mine. I'm Creator, therefore your mine. I've chosen you Israelites to be My treasured possession. He chose them out of all the races, and He covenants only with them. He continues though and adds to it; not only will they be His treasured possession, 'You shall be to Me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Please remember those words: you will be a treasured possession a Kingdom of priests a holy nation. Mark those down in your mind for a while.

Now I want you to imagine someone making such a statement today. We would immediately hear cries of racist, xenophobic, elitist, privileged. And in reality such words are words of jealousy because it's really the person saying, 'how come they get to be the treasured possession, the Kingdom of priests and holy nation? Why not me? They think they are so good that you've picked them God.' And that's not at all what God was saying. You see He chose the children of Israel to do a job and that job was to be a Kingdom of priests. What was the job of the priest? First and foremost, the job of the priests, according to scripture, is to preserve knowledge. It was the job of the priests to know the Bible and to share it; to pass it on from generation to generation. If the whole group is a Kingdom of priests, it is every family is supposed to be doing this.

Secondly, the priests were to divide provide intercession for the people. The people are sinners. God is not. The priest is to come in between God and them and make intercession for them on behalf of those who are going astray. Even if going astray maybe ticking the priest off; God says it doesn't matter. You pray for them, you intercede on their behalf, that's your job. 'But their choosing...' "I don't care" is what God says. The priests were to lead the people in worship they were to lead them in prayer, and they were to do this by the very way they live their lives.

Now again, let's back up a step. Who were the priests they all were priests? They were a Kingdom of priests. So, I couldn't point at that guy say

you're the priest. It's your job. No, they were all to be a Kingdom of priests. And ultimately, the job of the priests with preserving knowledge, interceding for the people, and leading worship and prayer and a life of righteousness; they were to bring the gospel message. They were to bring the message of who God was to the entire world. So, that's the job of a priest and that's what God has chosen them to do as a Kingdom of priests.

But they're also to be a holy nation. A holy nation of priests. Again holy means set apart. So, they were set apart to bring God's Word to the world. In word and deed. They were to bring all the nations to the living God, their maker, their Redeemer. And let's go and take a look at how successful they were. There was about 1400 years to 1500 years from the time of Mount Sinai to the time of Jesus and what do we see? Well Ruth the Moabitess, she became a believer. And well that's right Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho; she and her family became followers of God. When David's armies went out and conquered other countries some of the soldiers from the other countries pledge their allegiance to David and to God. Oh, we can't forget some of the Egyptians who saw God work in Egypt left with the Israelites too. That's it. That's their success over 1400 years. In reality, their own disobedience and their own unfaithfulness or faithlessness as a group, meant the rest of the world went on in darkness for that entire time until Jesus came. And when Jesus came, the Israelite saw, the gentiles saw and we today see, the Gods treasured possession, His Kingdom of priests, His holy nation; we see that they were unfaithful. When Jesus came and showed the world their total lack of faith in God fulfilling the prophecies. As we feel their deceitful hearts as they twisted the laws around and sought to kill Jesus. They showed the world their need for a savior. The children of Israel's need, as well as the Gentiles.

It showed the Gentiles and the Israelites that people are still set apart by God. But set apart to bring the Savior into the world. This is where we now transition to our gospel to that account of Zacchaeus, the short tax collector who heard Jesus was coming into town. So, he went on ahead on, shall we say, the parade route climbed up a Sycamore tree, because he was short, so he could see Jesus. When Jesus saw him, he said Zacchaeus come on down. I must go to your house today. Why must you go there? Because he knew Zacchaeus. He knew Zacchaeus was a descendant of Abraham. He knew that Zacchaeus was lost. But He knew that Zacchaeus was looking for an answer.

And when Jesus got there; there are those who ridiculed Him for eating with the tax collector. Tax collectors are hated and yet Jesus says, “today Salvation is come into this house, for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” Notice who is acting it's God through His Son Jesus who's doing the acting. He's seeking to save the lost, and who are the lost? The children of Israel were lost. They had been unfaithful. They had turned away. They had lost everything; other than being that conduit for whom the Messiah would come. They needed a Savior, but so did the Gentiles.

And now let's be honest; while the children of Israel were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they really were relatives with the Gentile people. The Jews and the Gentiles because the Gentiles could trace their lineage back to Noah and his sons Ham, Shem and Japheth. So, they all had godly beginnings and they all had turned away. Neither Gentile nor Jew have remained faithful.

And like the Israelites, Christ also had a purpose. But unlike the Israelites, He fulfilled His. He obeyed His Father's voice. He kept the covenant and yet He was killed as the atoning sacrifice for us. He did not deserve to die. But when He rose from the dead, His resurrection showed His power over sin and of death and of the devil. He has now bought us, redeemed us so that like the children of Israel; we are now His possession. Understand, that's what the word redeemed means. He has bought us back and who the son of man came to seek and to save the lost, Jew and Gentile.

So now we hear Peter in our New Testament reading this morning saying, “You are a chosen race.” This is not a race that's identified by skin color, by DNA or by borders. It's identified by the heart. Is Christ on the throne of your heart? Do you put your total faith in Him? If so, that is your race. You are part of God's family. Which leads us to the very next thing He says. You're a chosen race, a Royal priesthood. Do you remember those words from before?” They were a Kingdom of priests, and we're not a Kingdom of priests, we are a Royal priesthood, or we are kingly priests. How can that be? Christ is our Redeemer. He has bought us back. He has made us a part of His family and He is the King of Kings. So, if we are His, we are royalty. We are a Royal priesthood. We now have the job of preserving knowledge, of sharing God's Word, of leading in worship and praise in prayer in teaching. It's all of our responsibility.

And Peter continues, and this is going to sound very familiar, a people for His own possession. It's a retelling of what God said at Mount Sinai. And now the mantle has been passed to us. We are Gods possession, for His desires. What does He desire most? Peter says, that you may declare the excellencies of Him who has called you out of the darkness, and into His marvelous light. We are saved to serve, not to sit. But, like the Israelites and the Gentiles, we're sinners. We may look at it and go, 'oh we are doomed to fail just like they were.'

This is where we look at the big differences and this is where Pentecost becomes so important. First of all, they were looking forward to the Savior, we have the advantage that we can look back at the Savior. And we can compare the life of Jesus to the prophecies and we can see how He fulfills the prophecies. We can see the miracles as being an attestation by God that He really is the Messiah. We can see the fulfillment of His death, His resurrection, His ascension. We have that advantage and that's a huge advantage.

Secondly, we have the full law and gospel message. We can now see that Jesus was not to be a political King. He was to be an eternal King. He came to fulfill the law. The wages of sin is death. He paid the price. And He rose from the dead, and the free gift of God is eternal life. And third, we have the Holy Spirit who has come with power so that we can live up to the clear identity that we have through Christ. We can live up to being the chosen race. We can live up to being the Royal priesthood. We can be God's own people. We can be His family, with a very clearly defined purpose to declare His excellencies.

But we can do it not because by golly's we're good; no, we can do it because we have the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who brings to our Remembrance the law and the gospel and what the atoning sacrifice of Jesus means; and we can see Jesus in the scriptures as that fulfillment. The challenge for us today, is total honestly look at ourselves and realize we are a chosen race with hearts turned to God through the power of the Spirit. We can be the Royal priesthood preserving the knowledge and passing it on because we have the Holy Spirit to help us in that endeavor and we can be God's own people and be that light that shines in the darkness. May we walk and talk as that Royal priesthood, as God's chosen race, as his Holy people to the glory of his name and to the Salvation of souls. Amen.