

**“Holiness and Missions”**  
**(1 Peter 2:4-12)**  
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**February 7th, 2010**

**Introduction:**

***NIV 1 Peter 2:4-12***

*<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

*“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone,” <sup>8</sup> and,  
“A stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

*<sup>10</sup> 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.*

*<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

Missions is never done alone. Never. It is always and only done through partnerships. And every one of the members of God’s church has a vital part to play. The apostle Paul was one of the first missionaries and as driven and independent as he was, his missions strategy was partnership. For example, Paul almost always traveled with a companion. He hardly ever ministered alone. As well, Paul was all about empowering others to join him in the work of missions. To the Philippians Christians he writes these words.

<sup>4</sup>In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup>because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now

Another example of this is found in the last chapter of Romans where Paul reviews a list of names, all of who are faithful believers, all with whom he has a deep relationship, and all of whom have been working for the gospel. It’s truly incredible to see the network of people that Paul has worked alongside of for the goal of missions.

The theme for this year’s missions month is “Be a Factor in God’s Work.” I think the missions committee was wise in selecting this topic because for many of us we have a somewhat skewed view of missions or should a skewed view of my role in missions.

1. Missions is for the spiritual elite.

2. Missions is optional.
3. Missions comes years later, after I've reached a certain level of spiritual maturity.

These views are just not true. You will not find a justification for these views in the bible.

1. Missions is for everyone, not for some elite group. Missions is not a special forces (green beret, delta force) operation. It is a citizens army operation. All of us have a role to play. There are no exceptions.
2. Missions is mandatory. As much as God commands his people to be holy, he commands us to missions. The bible offers no wiggle room for thinking that you don't have to do missions. CCM musician Keith Green wrote biting lyrics in a song about missions several decades ago,  
"Jesus commands us to go, it should be an exception if we stay. It's no wonder we're moving so slow, when God's children refuse to obey."
3. And missions begins immediately after we are saved and become Christians. For far too long, far too many Christians have come up with excuse after excuse to avoid missions. I'm not mature enough, I don't know the bible well enough, I'm not a great speaker, I don't have the answers to those difficult questions. And all the while, I don't see these same excuse-making Christians reading and studying their bibles or making an effort to understand theology. They are not reading books on apologetics to answer the tough questions, they are not taking advantage of opportunities to be equipped in evangelism and so on. They keep resisting going on short-term missions. At the end of the day an excuse is an excuse, and nothing more. At some point, each of us will need to go beyond that, stop making excuses, and start living in obedience. I hope today will be that day.

In the passage we read today, I want to help you understand the backdrop to this letter. The backdrop is persecution. In the midst of persecution their faith was being challenged and they were beginning to waver. So under these circumstances Peter addresses them with this letter. What does he talk about? Sure he talks about Christian behavior, absolutely. In the perilous situation you are in, your behavior, your actions, your speech as Christians is paramount.

But at the same time he also talks about their identity. When you tell people about their identity what's the aim? When a president or prime minister gives a sermon to his people and says things like...to be Canadian is to...or in the form of rebuke and challenge, the leader will say, Canadians aren't like that...Canadians don't do that.

When there's talk of identity it's because we've forgotten the essence of who we are. It's because we've strayed from our values and our goals. It's because there's a great adversary (totalitarianism, terrorism, economic instability, persecution, enemies of Christianity, whatever it is), there is a great adversary, so it's a call to arms and it's a call to unity.

As well, it's a call to courage. When you think of the great movies and the great speeches. Braveheart. Lord of the Rings. MLK jr's "I Have a Dream" speech. JFK's famous line, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country"...they are all a call to do the impossible, to have courage, to face our enemy within and without. These great speeches speak of identity, unity, a call to join arms to achieve together what would be impossible to achieve on our own—those are the themes of those speeches. It is no different in Peter's letter to the scattered church communities in Asia.

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Allow me to focus on just one verse from this passage. Verse 9.

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This is our speech of inspiration. As a Christian community this is our collective identity. In this verse there are several terms that are used to describe who we are as Christians. Chosen people. Royal priesthood. Holy nation. A people belonging to God. What you might notice from the get-go is that there is not a single individualistic description in this passage. It's not about who you are, it's about who we are.

Here's what happens to each one of us. God saves and redeems people individually. I cannot be saved on behalf of another person. I don't give an account on behalf of you and vice-versa. We all come to Christ as individuals. *I* personally have to become aware of *my* sins and *I* have to repent before God and *I* have to accept the gift of salvation in his Son and *I* have to commit to live with Jesus as my Lord. All of it is very, very personal. We sometimes call it our personal testimony.

But what we see as the pattern of Scripture is this. As soon as an individual became a Christian, they were immediately incorporated into the community of the local church. There were no solo, loner Christians.

Here's what the bible doesn't mean by being incorporated into the church. It doesn't mean they avoided church because they were full of hypocrites and instead stayed at home alone on Sunday and worshipped watching a preacher on TV.

It doesn't mean they attended church on Sunday, sat in the chapel, worshipped, listened to a sermon and during the final prayer, snuck out, ran for the parking lot without speaking to a soul. It doesn't mean that.

It doesn't mean coming to church if you wake up on time or if you feel like or if you have nothing better to do. To be a Christian is to be a vital and active part of the local church.

And some of you need to hear that because that's what you might think church to be.

The bible instead teaches that when individuals became Christians they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). In other words, people, when they became Christians, immersed themselves into the life of the community called the church.

If I can give one more example it's from Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts in the book of 1 Corinthians 12. The essence of the teaching is that each of us brings to the table a uniqueness and variety of special God given talents and gifts. There is found our individuality. But individuality is never the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is community. So the individual talents you and I have are given to us by God for the sake of the community. For example, one of my spiritual gifts is preaching. I don't preach when I'm alone. I don't have a little chapel at home with a little pulpit. I don't prepare sermons so I can preach them merely to myself. I do all that to bless the community. And so Paul employs the most natural and most understandable metaphor to describe the uniqueness of individuals coming together as a community—the body. The body is made up of many many different parts...over 200 bones, different systems-respiratory, nervous, digestive and other systems but it is still one body.

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So here are the descriptions Peter gives of our collective identity.

Chosen people or a chosen race.

Throughout the bible God chooses. It is his sovereign will and right to choose. It is not our place to question why we were or were not chosen. That right belongs to God alone. So he chooses Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, Paul, and so on.

But before we get hung up on why he chooses some and not others, we must understand the reason for God choosing. One of the primary reasons God chooses a certain person or even a certain nation, or a certain church, or a certain ministry, is so they can be a blessing to others. He chooses them so they can help others become part of God's chosen people.

Abraham is our foundation example of this. God chose an 80 year old pagan to become a worshipper of Yahweh. Abraham didn't do anything to deserve this, God out of his sovereign will chose him. And the promise God gave to Abraham was this. I will bless you and you will be a blessing to others.

So if you are chosen, the wrong responses are: horn tooting. Sore winner. Pride.  
Right responses: humility, thankfulness, mission.

You and I have been chosen by God in Christ to form this people, to form this new race, and it's called the church, where slave and free, rich and poor, male and female. Jew and Gentile can all come together and be his chosen people.

A royal priesthood and A holy nation

This phrase is quoted verbatim from Exodus 19:6. What's the context there? Well two important events. One before, one after. Before? Deliverance from Egypt and slavery. The after event? The giving of the Law of God.

<sup>1</sup> *In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. <sup>2</sup> After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.*

<sup>3</sup> *Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now 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, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."*

To those who keep God's covenant this identity is ensured.

The priests were mediators between the people and God. They are the one through whom the people would interact with God. And he declares to the whole nation that they are all priests, that they are a nation of priests. And what was the primary duty of priests? Worship. So you and I are to be a nation, a people of worshippers. Worshipping is not something we do for 23 minutes before the sermon. Worshipping is a part of our identity as the people of God.

At the same time we are a holy nation. What Israel failed to do in being holy, the church cannot, will not fail. Israel was given the law at Sinai so they could know in what manner they were to live in relationship to God, to each other and to their pagan neighbors. And at the root of their mission was not strategy, it wasn't money, it wasn't demographic study, all of which are terribly important

for effective ministry and missions. The root of their missions was holiness. The way they relate to God is primary. The way they relate to each other is secondary. Get those two right and missions will be effective.

A people belonging to God  
Or more literally, a people for possession  
Throughout the Old testament God reiterates to Israel. I will be your God and you will be my people. It implies a very deep level of intimacy. Of all the peoples of the earth, you in particular belong to me.

What is the purpose of our rich identity?

It is to sing the song of salvation to the nations.

The purpose of our rich identity, our being chosen, our striving to be holy, is to sing the praises of the goodness of God in Jesus Christ for the salvation of humankind. And this singing is not primarily a song we sing to each other as Christians. It's a song we sing to the nations. The people who have not yet heard. Metaphorically, we sing that God loves sinners, that he sent his Son, that there is forgiveness, that sinners can be saved, that we can be children of God.

In 1993 John Piper wrote a landscape-changing book on missions called "Let the Nations be Glad." In typical John Piper fashion he said something that is so foundational, so true, but something that's been forgotten or neglected and he reintroduces it in a way that's like a knockout punch. Here's what he wrote.

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions. Because God is ultimate, not man."

Again Piper wasn't saying anything new. He was saying what the bible has been saying. 1 Peter 2:9 is saying this. We are what we are in God so that we may declare the praises (WORSHIP) of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Revelation 5 shows us a glimpse of heaven and the song they were singing when the end comes and representatives from all the peoples of the earth are gathered before the throne of God. This is the song they will sing.

<sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song:

*"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased men for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

<sup>10</sup>You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth."

<sup>11</sup>Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands,  
and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and  
the elders. <sup>12</sup>In a loud voice they sang:

*"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!"*

<sup>13</sup>Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and  
all that is in them, singing:

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb*

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*be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!" <sup>14</sup>The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and  
worshiped*

This is the song of salvation. This is the goal of missions. That all peoples, in Kyrgyzstan, Guadalajara, Cambodia, St. James Town, on your school campuses and places of work, would sing the song of salvation. To that end we live out this identity, our holiness, for missions.

