

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 17th March 2024 pm

TITLE: "Praying to know who you are" TEXT: 1 Peter 2 v 1-12

Series: How to pray for my church Part 4

Scripture references from the ESV

1 Peter 2:1-12 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." ⁷ So the honour 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.

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 marvellous 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 honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Who we know ourselves to be is meant to change how we live

Being born into the Royal Family, or wearing the uniform of any organisation, has implications for how you are expected to behave, because your behaviour will reflect on the family or organisation.

That is especially true when it comes to God's people, and that is why Peter tells us who we are (**vv9-10** above). He is not telling us who we are meant to be, or what we will become, but who we actually are.

This is our identity. It is who we are.

He is telling us this so that we will see the importance of doing what is commanded in **v1** and **v11**.

Earlier, Peter has told us that **we are to love one another earnestly from a pure heart** (1 Peter 1:22) and v1 (above) tells us how we are to do that. **Put away** implies dirty clothes that we are to put off:

- Malice - evil intentions against one another
- Deceit - lies that harm or undermine a fellow human being
- Hypocrisy – evil intentions that are masked by a superficial show of righteousness
- Envy and all slander – bringing someone’s reputation into disrepute

We are to replace these sinful, filthy garments with the righteous garments of Christ’s love

Then (v11), we are urged to fight against the indwelling sin that wages war against the souls of all Christian believers. Such sinful passions cannot take away our salvation, but they fight to undermine our fellowship with the Lord and to rob us of our joy in God. We are not to walk in anything that prevents us from walking in the Spirit.

We are reminded of our identity as God’s people as an encouragement:

- to put off sinful garments that undermine fellowship with our brothers and sisters
- to abstain from sinful passions that undermine our fellowship with God.

Who we know ourselves to be – God’s chosen and precious people – is meant to change how we live

It is meant to change how we relate to one another and to the Lord

1. **We, the church, are a people who are chosen and precious in Christ.** Under the old covenant, Moses told Israel this from God: **Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.** (Deuteronomy 10:15).

Peter applies **chosen race** (v9) to the church under the new covenant. What Israel was meant to be, and one day will be, is what we are now as God’s people, but only because of Christ alone (vv4-5).

Christ is the great cornerstone of a spiritual building made up of living stones – that is all of us, his church, as we come to him. Though rejected and crucified by men,

Christ is chosen and precious to God the Father.

As we come to him so we are aligned to him, united in him and placed in him. Our whole life is bound up with him. Throughout the New Testament, our being **in Christ** is a constant refrain, and therefore Peter can describe us as a chosen race for we too have been chosen. As a consequence, we are also precious to Christ and to the Father.

- **Do you see the church as a people who are chosen by Christ and precious to him?**

When we see ourselves and other believers united with us as belonging to this chosen and precious race then:

- We will take off the filthy garments of disunity that ruin our fellowship with one another
- We will abstain from those desires of the flesh that ruin our fellowship with Christ

We are a people who are chosen by Christ and precious to him

2. We are a people who have unbelievable status in Christ. Peter speaks of us as a royal priesthood, a concept that is hard to feel excited about in our modern culture. However, for a first century Jew who had come to faith in Christ, it would have been unbelievable. Both royalty and priests had high status and immense privileges.

- Royal status was only for those of King David's family line. You were part of the ruling class, making decisions that would shape the nation
- Priests only came from the tribe of Levi but had access to the special courts and holy places in the temple, where you met with God. You were the ones who took human concerns to God and applied his forgiveness to the people.

When you were just an ordinary Israelite, who could not trace your roots to the royal family or the priestly tribe:

- You were dependent on David's line to make good decisions
- You were dependent on Levi's line to experience God's forgiveness and know what God required of you.

Coming to faith in Christ made you a member of the royal priesthood, raising you to the status of belonging to both those who rule and those who have direct access to

God. How life-changing that would have been. You were nothing and now you are something!

As those united to Christ, we have the immense privilege of belonging to that same **royal priesthood**:

- We now have royal status in God's kingdom. We cannot change anything now but one day we will reign with Christ
- We are priests in God's covenant people. We have access to God and minister God's grace to others
- **Do you see the church as a people who are a royal priesthood?**

When we see ourselves and other believers as those who will reign with Christ and now have access to God then:

- We will take off the filthy garments of disunity that ruin our fellowship with one another
- We will abstain from those desires of the flesh that ruin our fellowship with Christ

We are a people who have unbelievable status in Christ.

3. We are a people who are united together in Christ. Living as we do in a culture that is individualistic, we tend to think about our faith in that way too. It is likely that you think of how God chose you, and wonder that God listens to you. That is not wrong, but it undermines the glory of Christ's body, the church. Peter is talking about

a community in these verses. Race, priesthood, nation and people are all plural terms. The emphasis is on the community to which Christ has united us and we belong to that community. Peter uses the picture of a building (**vv4-5**) to help us see unity within community.

Imagine the temple, with a huge foundation stone in one corner. The builders then go on to select other stones which they place in the best position and align to the foundation stone. The foundation stones and the individual stones together form one building, but is the cornerstone that stands out.

In this community to which we belong, Christ is the cornerstone and we, as living stones, are being dressed to be like him. God chooses where we are placed as he forms one building – a temple for the Lord to dwell in that draws attention to Christ.

- **Do you see the church as a people who are this spiritual building to bring glory to Christ on earth?**

When we see ourselves as those who are living stones, united to Christ and therefore to each other then:

- We will take off the filthy garments of disunity that ruin our fellowship with one another
- We will abstain from those desires of the flesh that ruin our fellowship with Christ

We are a people who are united together in Christ.

Why are we a people who are chosen and precious in Christ, who have unbelievable status in Christ and who are united together in Christ? It is because of our calling (vv5,9).

We are that people so that we might bring glory to the God who has chosen us, raised us to royal and priestly status, and united us together.

Two issues result from this:

- a) **We need to understand the spiritual nature of this identity as God's people.** In centuries past, when missionaries from the UK went to foreign lands, they wrongly assumed that those nations had to adopt British customs to be truly Christian. In their eyes, Christian identity was tied up with British culture. As a result, great damage was done in the name of Christianity since other nations equated the gospel with the need to abandon their own culture. When Hudson Taylor bucked that trend and adopted Chinese culture wherever it did not clash with the word of God, he and his missionaries were able to show that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for every culture. It was not just a British invention!

Peter is seeking to show us that we are a spiritual community who live for Christ in the culture in which Christ has placed us. We are **not** called to proclaim a Christianised British culture or a traditional church culture.

We are called to proclaim the excellencies of God to every tribe, nation and people group.

We get our community identity from Christ, not from some historic and external view of how Christians should dress or what they should eat and drink.

Our primary identity is found in Christ.

The nation and race we belong to is Christ.

When we grasp that, we will find out what it means to be a Christian living in Broadstone in the 21st century. However, we need something else to help us to find ways to live out this identity in our current culture because

it is an identity that is spiritual in nature and not external

b) We need to pray that God will help us to know who we are. As we have looked at how we can pray for our church, we have seen that we are to be a church who:

- Give thanks to God for our church
- Ask God to enable us to love God and our neighbours, both within and outside the church
- Ask God to mature us

Now we can see that we also need to ask God to help us know who we are. We need that knowledge not just at an intellectual level, but deep in our hearts.

We need to feel the wonder of belonging to a people

chosen and precious in Christ, raised to be a royal priesthood in Christ and united together in Christ.

We need to really pray this truth into our hearts. The Puritans spoke of really screwing down the text into our hearts until it burns with passion. We will never live as the people we are until we screw this truth down into our hearts through prayer, study and meditation so that it burns with holy passion.

We can pray like this on our own, but praying with other people allows us to wrestle together as the people of God and really cry out to God to ignite these truths in our hearts, by his Spirit. We can press deeper into Christ and all that we are in him when we gather together for united prayer. When we plead with God together, then these truths catch fire in our hearts and that is how revival starts.

We need revival in this nation but we are in Broadstone, and Broadstone, and this church, need revival.

We must cry out to God to come by his Spirit and make these truths real to us. Like babies screaming for milk, we need to be crying out for the pure spiritual milk of God's word with that same passion and we need the Spirit of God to awaken that passion in our hearts.

- Come to the prayer meetings and pray for these truths to become reality for us.

Who we know ourselves to be is meant to change how we live

For that to happen we need the Spirit of God to work in us

**Let us pray that big, sweeping (but not insipid) prayer together, as the people of God,
and see what God will do**