

A Royal Priesthood

Call to Worship: Psalm 8

1st Scripture: Luke 1:57-80

2nd Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-12

Hymn Insert - *Come, People of the Risen King*

Hymn #87- *Holy, Holy, Holy*

Hymn # 705- *Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord*

Introduction

Generally, when we come to a New Year, considerations of the past, present and future, tend to fill our minds and hearts. People often look back to consider what they've accomplished over the last year (or more) and whether or not certain expectations and goals have been met. And then, they consider where they presently are, and what changes might have to be made, to ensure that a proper destination is reached at a particular point in time, in the future. The famous "weight loss" analogy provides us with a good example, doesn't it? An individual who has put on a few unwanted pounds over the last year, may not be comfortable with where he is, and so, he plans to re-adjust his diet, with the hope of trimming down by the end of the new year. And we call such goals, "New Year's Resolutions."

Well, this morning, I want to borrow a portion of this format, but in a more general and broad sense, with the hope that a reminder of our former past, carried over into our positional present, might motivate us to re-examine our present goals, so that we might make any necessary adjustments/changes as we now enter into a new year. While we ought to do this more often than once a year, sometimes, the whole concept of a new year, just affords us with a new opportunity to take a present inventory of our lives, to ensure that we are on the right track. And if we find that we have gone off a bit, we can, by the grace of God and prayer, reposition ourselves spiritually. To be sure, brethren, the years are flying by, aren't they? And as we've witnessed the recent deaths of the relatively young George Michael and Carrie Fisher, hopefully we are reminded that there is a designated day approaching each and every one of us, when we will be the one staring up from the inside of a coffin. And hopefully, when that day comes, we can look back from the arms of a smiling Christ, and say, "We've fought the good fight, we've finished the race. And now, a crown of glory awaits me."

I. What We Once Were [Read verses 9-10 again]

In comparing those who have rejected Christ as the Chief Cornerstone, to those who are in Christ (Peter's audience), Peter seeks to motivate the brethren unto God-glorifying living, by recalling who they now are, who they once were, and how that difference ought to compel them to live different than those who still live in the darkness that encompasses all who are not in Christ. And so, that is why he begins with the words, "But you are...", found in verse 9. Notice, in verse 8, he states, "*They* stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you...". You see, Peter is dealing with a contrast here, and the ultimate difference between those who stumble (those who are disobedient) and the "But you are..." people, involves the sheer grace of God, which has transported those who are in Christ, from out of the one realm (the realm of condemnation and disobedience) and into another (the realm of justification, sanctification and obedience).

And then, it is here that Peter provides a glorious description of how the people of God have been transferred from the one, lost, horrible state, into the other, blessed, eternally joyful state. And again, this is to motivate his audience to live accordingly. For, one who has experienced such a dramatic shift from one realm into another, ought to live differently in the new realm, than they once did, when they were part of the old realm, within which, the condemned still live. Notice then, some of the descriptive ways, in which, Peter describes their former experience, before they were graciously transferred into the new realm.

1) We notice first that Peter describes their former life, as a life that was composed of darkness. [Read verse 9 again] We notice then that they were called out of their former state of *darkness* and into His (that is God's) marvelous light. And what is the substance of this darkness? Well, those of you who know the Lord, know exactly what it is, don't you? It was living life totally apart from having any genuine relationship with your Creator. It was spiritual blindness, paralysis...indeed, death. It was being stuck in the cycle of everyday life, caught up in temporal things that neither fulfill you nor matter in the long run, looking for the next best thing to fill the void of godlessness. The connection to the Creator was non-existent and sin ruled us like the Egyptian slave masters ruled the weary, over burdened, suffering Israelites. It was a life of hopelessness, confined to this world, while standing on a conveyor belt heading straight for

hell. It was, as Paul describes in Ephesians 2, being "dead in trespasses and sins." It was utter darkness, being incapable of seeing beyond a life that has been organized and set up by the devil himself, who would busy us with all manner of empty things that do nothing more than keep us busy and distracted, while the wrath of God grows exceedingly above our heads, waiting for the switch of death to be pulled, leading us into everlasting judgment and condemnation. That was where we were.

2) Peter moves on in verse 10, to add, "who once were not a people but are now the people of God..." And so, we find another descriptive statement here, exposing the former state of God's people. They were once "not a people." In what sense? Well, in the sense that they, once, being alienated from and at enmity with God, had no sense of belonging to the glorious God who created us for His glory. They were as Cain and the gentiles of old, in comparison to Israel. They were exiled away from the people of God, given over to their wicked lusts and debauchery, enjoying no fellowship with the living God. Indeed, they created gods of their own, after their own hearts, attempting to fill the void, which the true and living God alone could fill. They were abandoned orphans, longing for a true, eternal father to love and care for them, but they were without hope, until Christ made them a people...a people of God!

3) Finally, they were once a people "who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." Here, their former state, in keeping with the other descriptions, shows that they were in their former darkness, being not a people in fellowship with God (being spiritual orphans), having not obtained mercy. That is to say that, they were righteously left and abandoned in the deserved condemnation of their sins. They were left under the damning power of the Law, which is no friend to those who are born with a fallen nature that compels us to break God's Law. They had no outstretched hand of God directed toward them, which alone could rescue them from their deserved condemnation. God is holy. Man is not. Man is fallen, rebellious, ungodly and worthy of all condemnation. Man cannot fix the breach between himself and God. God is not obligated to reach across the breach Himself, especially when such a reach, involves the incarnation, shameful rejection and death of His eternal Son. And so, they once were not the object of God's undeserved mercy, where He freely pardons the condemned, not counting their sins against them.

All in all, brethren, we find that the natural man...indeed, you and I, in our natural state in Adam, are in a miserably hopeless state. We were formerly alienated from God, bound to darkness, once not a people and once not recipients of God's free grace. That is our former state. That is what we once were. And our minds still carry the memories of that pitiful life, don't they? We still remember the old man, even though he has died with Christ, and the new man has risen with Christ in his stead, which brings us to the present...

II. What We Now Are

We once were...that's the past, but now we are...

1) A chosen generation. That is to say, that out of the same lump of cursed, fallen, darkened humanity, God has chosen to redeem and forgive and wash some. He has chosen to transfer us, we who are by nature equally as deplorable and naturally damned as everyone else...He has chosen to bring us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. He has chosen to make, we who were once not a people (like everyone else), a special people for Himself...the people of God. He has transferred us from out of the realm of darkness and condemnation and into the realm of His blessed church.

And you see, the "chosen" generation concept, implies what it states, namely, that we were graciously "chosen." Notice, this is not an act that is based on anything that we have done. We were lost in the mix of this condemned world, but He chose us in Christ. And in Ephesians 1, the Apostle Paul avows that this election took place before the foundation of the world was even laid. Notice, that back in verse 8, those who stumble and remain disobedient and in the world, and die in that state, have been "appointed" unto that end (read vs. 8). But, we who are in Christ are a new generation, a chosen generation, a "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" generation! And so, by this first term, we find special emphasis being placed on the means of our transfer, from one kingdom (of darkness) into another kingdom (of marvelous light).

We now see and comprehend the truth. We understand why we are here, that we belong to God, that it is our sin which has separated us from this God (leading us unto a life's pursuit of dumb idols), and that, God has provided us a free redemption and reconciliation unto Himself through Christ. Indeed, the light is marvelous! It is profound! It is amazing! We can now

clearly see the dark trenches, within which, we once wandered about with the world, and we can now see the glory of God, our Creator, in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ, to whom and for whom and by whom, all things exist and were created! Abundant life has been revealed to us and it is a most glorious sight to behold, is it not?! We are a chosen generation, chosen to receive God's free mercy and grace, who once had not received it, or even comprehended it.

2) A royal priesthood. We are priests unto God, serving under a better order than even Aaron, in Christ. For, we serve in the heavenly places, coming before God in His heavenly tabernacle, entering His Most Holy, heavenly throne room, in the presence of real cherubim and all manner of angelic beings. And there, through the ever effectual shed blood of Christ (which speaks better things than the blood of Abel), God meets with us, not once a year like the High Priest of old (in the earthly tabernacle), but whenever we so desire! And our worship and our intercessory prayers and our supplications are gladly received in Christ!

But we are not *just* a priesthood, as privileged of a position as that is. No, even more so, the ante is upped exponentially...we are a *royal* priesthood! We are priests with crowns and diadems, reigning with Christ, even as His Kingdom continues to penetrate and ultimately overcome the kingdoms of this world! Imagine that! Christ, not only willingly and graciously redeems us from out of our rebellion towards and hatred of Him, but furthermore, He carries us to His very throne, and says, as it were, "Come my brother/sister. Reign with Me!"

3) A holy nation. We are set apart unto God. We are taken out of the world; rescued from the corruption and ungodliness of our flesh, so that we might stand apart as God's unique trophies of grace, exalting the riches of His mercy and the greatness of His power, before angelic hosts and spiritual beings in the heavenly places. And as a holy nation, we are being formed more and more into the image of Christ, our glorious King, so that we might be partakers of the righteousness of God! We are set on the course of moral perfection. And we see that very work being done presently in our lives, even by the vehicles of trials and sufferings, as God chips away at all that continues to defile us, shaping every rough edge until we all come to the perfect man, complete in Christ. And when we finish this race; when we stand before our blessed Savior, we will see Him as He is, and right then and there, we will be like Him!

4) And finally, we are now His own special people. We are a particular people, purchased and redeemed by God, and for God, and that, unto a most glorious purpose! We have the great honor and privilege of being set apart unto and for God, so that, we might, "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." You see, there is an ultimate end in view here! There is an ultimate purpose, toward which, every other lesser purpose moves. It is that purpose, which ties into the very purpose for which God does all that He does, namely, to proclaim His glory!

And so, as we consider from where we were taken (out of our former state of darkness and condemnation), and to where we were transferred (into the marvelous light of God, as a called out royal priesthood, a holy nation and a special people of God), we come now to that ultimate end of God, for all things, and in looking forward, we evaluate this past year, and we consider if any adjustments need to be made, to ensure that we are on track with the purpose for which we have been created and redeemed.

III. Our Ultimate Purpose

And so, brethren, as we look forward into the new year, let me leave you with the general application, toward which, all of this points:

When we consider where we were, where we now are, and how, by the incomprehensible grace of God, that transferral has taken place; when we consider, indeed, how blessed we truly are in Christ; when we consider that our darkness has become light, that in not being a people we have become God's special people, that in not obtaining mercy we have now obtained mercy, that in having been a part of a kingdom of death and condemnation, we have now become a royal priesthood, let us examine our life movements (both in a broad and in a daily sense), to see if we are on the track of proclaiming the praises of the God, who has so marvelously worked in and revealed Himself to us. Let us be about our Father's business, revealing His manifold glory to both this lost and dark, fallen world, and the invisible heavenly places which overlaps it!

In a very real sense, brethren, we must see ourselves as modern day "John the Baptists," striving to "give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace." And this primary mission, brethren, as a chosen generation, called out of

the world and into the kingdom of Christ (by God), ought to be consciously pondered every single day of our lives, as we prepare to live and act in the sphere of life that God has ordained for each of us. In other words, be it at home, on the job, at the grocery store, amongst family and friends, on the road, in the church....etc, in how we conduct the whole of our lives, we ought not to live blindly as the world does, but rather, we ought to look for intentional ways to reveal God's power and glory in us, by our words, actions; indeed, in all of our movements, such that even when we eat or drink, we strive to do all, for the glory of God.

This involves positive movements, looking for intentional ways of making Christ known to the world, and negative movements, in striving to live holy, God-honoring lives (putting remaining sin to death), which is in keeping with so great and so privileged a redemption, as has been granted us!

[Close with 1 Peter 2:11-12; 4:1-11]

The Gospel!

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!