

## Sermon: The Identity of God's People

Text: 1 Peter 2:9-10

By Bob Young

### Introduction

This sermon is perhaps as close as we will come to a "farewell" sermon. What should I say? Should I review Paul's farewell sermon to the elders in Ephesus? Perhaps I should consult other farewell sermons in the Bible—Jacob/Israel, Moses, Joshua, David....

What do you think of when you think of treasure? What do you treasure?

We mostly have secular ideas about treasures. Many treasure things more than people. This shows the materialism of our culture and its influence. Many Christians do not know how to lay up treasures in heaven because we tend to think about physical rather than spiritual realities.

I have been trying to say for over eight years to this church that Jesus is the real treasure, Col. 2. I remind us of the parable of the buried treasure and the parable of the pearl of great price in Matthew 13.

The things that we treasure—we cherish, protect, set aside, often use sparingly...

I have also been saying that we will not get the search and rescue mission right until we understand the treasure. The treasure is something we seek. When we finally find it, when we finally get the message, we see that the real purpose of God focuses on the truth that we are the treasure, others are the treasure, the world is his treasure, and he wants help in finding those who will be his.

God treasures his people. This OT concept is often reflected in NT.

God is jealous, possessive, he wants a people for his own possession, uniquely his, belonging to none other. We have missed this, and we have missed the why. We have thought God was being mean and unloving and vengeful. The truth is that he is protecting us, he sets us apart; he will not subject us to dangerous conditions on purpose. Illustration: many older vehicles in Michigan are put away for the winter to protect them from the salt and rust. This idea runs throughout 1 Peter. God restores us, makes us like new. He shields us. The polishing that is for a positive purpose may seem harsh. He repairs, he strengthens. These concepts find focus in the text of 1 Peter 2:9-10. This is God's description of his treasure.

There are many ideas to be gleaned from these verses, but I share only three.

**First, the church is God's idea.** God is the one who gives the church, and the members of the church, value. We are God's plan and God's possession—God's treasured people. God chose you—specifically fashioned you, lost you, and after finding you again, put you in the church. God chose us. God chose us before we chose him. We are not the initiators; we did not choose God. The church is God's people—those over whom God reigns as king. We are God's creation, we are God's idea; we were created by God, built by God, according to his specifications. We are constructed into one holy nation. Somewhere in this concept is God's plan for restoring broken horizontal relationships as well as the broken vertical relationship. This is the source of genuine unity.

**Second, the church is called to holiness.** We are a holy people. God set apart a people to himself, a holy nation, belonging to him. Holiness is so all-inclusive as to be almost beyond comprehension. Holiness from God's point of view is a description of his protection, shielding, preserving, beautifying. Holiness is restoring and repairing. Holiness affects every part of life. Holiness is not some grand mystery—holiness sets us apart for God's purposes and God's plan. Holiness determines the actions of my life. You are not more holy because you are present in a church assembly; you are present because you recognize God's desire for holiness in your life. This holiness (set apartness) changes priorities and enables purity. We are dedicated for a special purpose, unadulterated, pure in the sense of not having impurities. This awareness of God's purpose guards us and keeps us away from those things outside God's purpose for us. Holiness begins in the work of God; we have talked not enough about sanctification as a Biblical concept, sanctification that continues as we walk with Christ. Holiness is our response to God's work, our submission, our discipleship, our willingness to follow.

**Third, the church is God's royal priesthood.** This reflects the promise of Exodus 19:5-6. That we are priesthood means we can approach God directly through Christ. That we are priesthood also means we are priests to others. We have understood the first point better than the second. We are God's priests to the world. You are a priest to your neighbor, coworker, brother or sister in Christ, or at least we as a church are called to that identity. The church thus becomes God's presence in the world and accepts the responsibility to intercede for the world before God's throne. We are to be God's presence; we are to intercede on behalf of the world. God has treasures other than us. God's human creation is potentially his treasure—he, and his disciples, are searching for and rescuing the lost. Being royal priesthood means being God's presence in the world—representing him, showing others his presence, his nature. Being a royal priesthood means interceding on behalf of the world. Our prayers cannot be only for self and our little circle. Our prayers and intercessions must be for our world—for the hurts and pains, the lostness, the godlessness. This is our world—the without hope, without Christ, without God, alienated, estranged world.

## **Conclusion**

I have two final statements. You may wish to respond and reaffirm your identity in Christ. You may wish to make changes and find strength in God and this spiritual family. You may wish to join this spiritual family on the pilgrimage and journey we share. You may wish to affirm that you will let God do with the treasure of your life whatever he wishes—beginning your walk with him through the polishing and perfecting, sanctification and cleansing of baptism. You will have these opportunities when we sing. Now two final statements.

- The church exists in the world as aliens and strangers; that truth reflects the real tragedy which is that the world is alien and stranger to God.
- The text: the church is a chosen people treasured by God, a holy nation, a royal priesthood. So that....you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.