

A Royal Priesthood

1 Peter 2: 4-10 (Key verse 9)

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

What is our identity? We generally identify ourselves through race, gender, language and in some instances, through the ever-evolving culture. Being conscious about our identity best explains who we are and to whom we belong. Let me remind you of who we are, in Christ Jesus: Once we were not a people, but now through Christ, we are people of God. Once we have not received mercy, but now, through Jesus, we have received mercy. This is who we are; a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession. Through Jesus, we belong to the Lord God, who is our Father. Apostle Peter used these words to uplift a discouraged church by reminding them of who they truly are. The church, made up of both Jewish and gentile Christians, was persecuted and rejected by even their own people because of their faith in Jesus. We too live in a fallen world, and we can overcome it by knowing who we are, and to whom we belong to. In today’s passage, we will also discover our identity as a Royal Priesthood. What does it mean to be a Royal Priesthood, and what is our main purpose in this regard?

Firstly, it is important to know that our identity is closely linked and purely dependant on Jesus. So, for this reason, we must come to Jesus, and believe in Him. Hence, Apostle Peter encourages the church in verse 4a **As you come to him, the Living Stone.**

Jesus is the prime guide and example of our spiritual identity. Do you want to know how you will be treated in the world? Look at how the world treated Jesus. Do you want to know how you will be treated by God? Look at how God saw and valued Jesus. Look at verse 4 again. **As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.** Jesus is described here as the Living Stone. This is because God used Him as the foundational stone to build His spiritual house. Even though He is precious to God and His value known by God, he was rejected by humans. The ultimate rejection of Jesus by the people was when He was sentenced to be hanged on the cross. A notorious criminal was instead released from prison, and the blameless Jesus condemned. Of course we know this was part of God’s plan to save humankind from sin, however, it was the people who blatantly rejected Jesus. Because of unbelief, they did not know Jesus’ true value, and most importantly so, how they needed Jesus for salvation from sin.

Now, in the same way, as they have rejected Jesus, so will the world reject us. Just as they were hostile to Jesus, so is the world hostile to those who believe in Jesus. Even our very own bodies testify against this new found identity. On every day and night, our sinful flesh is continually waging war against our spiritual identity. We desire to glorify God, however in reality we often feel tempted to sin against God, and in some instances, fall into sin. So then, how should we respond to the rejection of God’s way? How should we respond to our rejection by the world? Look at verse 4 again. **As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.** We should remember that, despite all these, we are chosen by God and so precious to Him. Wow, do you believe this? Do you believe that you are precious to our Lord God the King? We are special to our Father and King. Yes, the world might reject us, but the truth is, through Jesus our Living Stone, we are accepted and chosen by God. Yes, sin tends to always crush us; destroying whatever confidence we have in God, and thus making us worthless. However, we should always remember that we are precious and valuable to God. Yes, the entire world and all its principalities can be against us, but through Jesus our

Living Stone, the Creator God of the heavens and earth, is for us. You see, through Jesus as our Living Stone, God has put in place everything for our victory in this new spiritual identity.

Do you know why we are chosen by God and precious to Him? Look at verse 5 to see why. **You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** You see, just as it was with Jesus, we too are being built into a spiritual house. Just as Jesus is the Living Stone, so are we as well; living stones used by God to built His spiritual house. I can almost imagine a builder picking up special and strong bricks, and carefully using them to build up the walls of solid skyscraper. That has been the plan of God from generations to generations; building His spiritual house through His own people. It is the case even in this generation, that God has chosen each and everyone one of us, who believe in Jesus, to be integral construction parts of His spiritual House.

I am particularly encouraged by the work of God in our SRC. Indeed, God is building a spiritual house through our Wits UBF student team for the blessing of many lost campus souls. I mean, this time around, our SRC and church members, were hard a work this O week in campus despite the rain, preaching Jesus and inviting students to sign up. You know, once we were just a handful, however, God has always been building His spiritual house through that little, that today, we go out in numbers and invite students to the kingdom of God through our Wits UBF ministry. Indeed, we are all living stones; precious and chosen by God to be built into a spiritual house for campus students. Amen!

So then, how should we respond to this marvellous grace of God? We should come to Jesus, believe in Him, and most importantly trust Him. Look at verse 6. **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."** We should always seek Jesus and have a need for Him. This is how we come to Jesus. God has put Him before us so that we believe in Him, and trust in Him. and this is God's promise to those who trust in Him: They will never be put to shame! They will never succumb to the condemnation of sin, but rather they will look at the cross, and raise their heads high in confidence against their accuser. They will never suffer being diminished by the world's rejection, rather, they will know their worth in God's eyes, and therefore overcome any sense of judgment, condemnation, insignificance and see themselves as royalty precious to God. Amen!

However, there is also a warning for those who do not believe in Jesus. Look at verse 7 and 8. **7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.** If we reject Jesus in unbelief; not embracing Him for who He is, indeed we will be ashamed, and regret not believing in Him. It would probably be too late when we realise what we have missed out on. Rejecting Jesus also causes us to stumble, and fall. What hope do we have if we kick and spill the very medicine of our terminal illness? We do not know of the time of His appearing. We do not know the exact time of our death. It would be a terrible eternal loss of life should be die without sincerely coming to Jesus and believing in Him. Therefore, this calls for us to repent, and obey God's message to come to Jesus, believe and trust in Him wholeheartedly. I pray that God opens our hearts and eyes to see Jesus and believe in Him as our Living and Cornerstone. Amen!

However, we are different. We are not destined to fall nor stumble, nor miss our salvation. No! Let us read today's key verse. **9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** Yes, through Christ our Living Stone, we are God's special possession. Yes, through

Christ Jesus the Cornerstone, we are the objects of God's love. This is our new found spiritual identity; a Royal Priesthood.

What does this mean to be a Royal Priesthood? It simply means that we are also part of a generation of priests that God has set apart, to serve before the King and most important enjoy communion with Him. God has been preparing a kingdom of priests since the beginning of time, until now and also in the future. Oh what a privilege it is to be called priests of the Creator God!

With Jesus at the centre of it all, a royal priesthood is the spiritual house God is building. This vision of God started with the Israelites. There was nothing special about the nation of Israel. However, God in His great mercy, chose them as the objects of His glory. In Exodus 19 **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, 6 you[a] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' The Lord in His great plan, displayed power, signs and wonders through Israel in order to teach the many other nations of who He is. The many other many nations would wonder how on earth the nation of Israel was successful in almost anything they put their hands on. And the answer would be 'the Almighty God'. God protected the Israelites, He provided for them in the desert and above all, brought the Messiah through them. This is what He was building them into. Now, we have a much better, and perfect calling through the sanctification given us through Jesus Christ. We are a Royal Priesthood – not limited to race, language nor geography. By faith in Jesus, anyone from whatever background, and nation, is also part of this priesthood. In this way, the whole earth will eventually be filled with a special chosen people of God, glorifying the name of the Lord.

The question is, 'do you see how you all individually fit in this plan of God'? Are you ready to accept this new identity or are you still undecided? Be reminded of the fate of those who reject God, and His ways. Nonetheless, blessed, and wise are those who will from today on, accept this calling as royal priests.

So then, what is the purpose of these royal priests? Look at key verse again. **9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** The purpose is to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. We all have a dark past. We all have lived in sin, and got lost in it. Yes, it is quite embarrassing to think about it. Back then, while still in the darkness of unbelief and disobedience, we thought there was nothing wrong with our lives. There was no need to repent, but simply to carry on living as the world defined us. There was never a standard of God that we felt we needed follow. But now, the unthinkable happened; God in His great mercy, through Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the sins of the world, a new birth, a new identity, a new life came to being in us. God brought us out of darkness into His light. Now, that is all we have to do as long as we are living; to praise God for snatching us out of sin, into this wonderful light, calling us His royal priests.

You see, a priest is some sort of a mediator between God and men. He also calls and lead people to God. It is almost impossible for a mere mortal man to understand and come to God, on his own. Generally, as mentioned, we are hostile and rebellious towards God. We need some sort of a mediator, someone who can guide us to God and teach us the ways of God. Yes, that perfect mediator is indeed Christ Jesus Himself! However, we too, are those small mediators to make known the name of the Lord, and to be used by God to bring people to Him. This is done through the sincere testimony from our lips, and the praises we give to God for saving us from sin. And guess what, as we praise God in this regard, someone who is still in darkness would think '*Ohh, this is the same life I am living,*

perhaps I need to get out of it'. In this way, through our confessions and praises of God who saves us from sin, the Holy Spirit is able to work in them to repent and now come to the light; this new found spiritual identity. They too become living stones dear to God, and built into this spiritual house.

I thank God for calling me out of darkness, into His light of salvation. From an ignorant a young man who lived a sexually immoral and ignorant about God, to being called a campus shepherd. I most especially thank God who has always been my comfort in my struggles. I took long to make it out from university, to graduate. There was a time where I was struggling a lot with how my life had turned out. I felt I was behind my peers; they graduated first, drove the best cars, and money didn't seem like a problem to them. I would often ask myself, '*why not me God*'? Then I would receive God's word that reminded how I am dear and special to God, despite my sins and my so called shortcomings. I remember receiving the word of God in Genesis 1:31 **God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...** With these words, I received so much comfort that even though there are so many things that I was not happy about my life, I am very good in God's eyes. Later on in covid 19, a lot happened as you know, and I am still recovering, and seemingly quite far from recovery. However, I really thank God for calling me His treasured possession, a living stone precious to Him, that He is using to build His spiritual house of a kingdom of royal priests. Praise be to God who saved me from sin, and called me into this life. Please pray for me to be used as a Sunday messenger in light with my new found identity as a royal priest. I pray that God help me to reveal His word, and deliver His message to His people He dearly loves. May this new identity also shape my life, and most importantly order my steps so that I repent from sin, and daily walk in obedience to His word.

During our new year bible academy, I was particularly moved by the year review testimonies of our brothers. They all had some serious challenges; from academics, to funding, from broken family problems to relationship issues, from falling into sin to feeling ashamed of their sinful nature, and condemned by sin. I felt quite powerless to be honest, and didn't know how to help them. I wondered why they had to go through these complex problems. But, God put a word in my heart which is to know how precious we are to Him, and who we are in His eyes. For me personally, this helped me a lot to overcome a lot of struggles, and it was with this hope that as they know who they are in God, all these challenges will not be fatal, but only to draw them closer to God. I thank God for this message that we can accept, and overcome any issues as we mediate on our new found spiritual identity.

In conclusion, please repeat after me, if you can. *I am, precious to God. I am, chosen by God. We are, a holy nation. We are, a royal priesthood.* Are we ready to receive God's calling for us in this new revealed identity? He calls us His precious chosen possession, a holy people, a royal priesthood. I am sure there are many changes happening in our lives right now; some have started new job, some are still studying, some are in their first year of studies, some are still going through a lot of challenges. Despite all these, let us use this opportunity to receive God's calling for us as His royal priesthood. Now then, let us come to Jesus our Living Stone. Let us obey and believe in Him all the more so that we too can be built into this spiritual house. Let us open our mouths, and declare His praises as we testify to campus people, and whoever is within our circle. Let us testify how God brought us out of darkness into His wonderful light. Let us be encouraged, emboldened to live a life worthy of this calling. May we deeply meditate on this word of God. I pray that God uses Wits UBF this year as a kingdom of royal priests, and a holy nation for His glory. Amen.