

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

WHO ARE WE?

Many people drift through life never realizing the fact that they are special individuals. Every man and woman is created in the image of God (Genesis 2:26-27) and therefore stands as supreme above all creation. Further, just as each human being possesses certain physical traits unique to them they also possess particular talents and abilities which make them the person they are. Our young children often sing a song which states, "You are special, you're the only one; you're the only one like you." How sad when adults fail to realize that they are special and that the potential to do much good lies within them.

Similarly, many Christians fail to realize just how important they are. Many of God's own children never come to a full understanding of who and why they are and thus fall short in not only living faithfully the Christian life, but being the great benefit to the kingdom that God so earnestly desires. Not only are Christians created in God's image, but they have been raised in the image of Christ (Romans 6:3-4) and possess distinctive and very unique characteristics which others do not enjoy, nor can being outside of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-12).

The apostle Peter, writing to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (I Peter 1:1), wrote specifically to encourage these brethren as they endured persecution in the name of Christ. NO doubt Peter, when he endured persecution as a Christian (Acts 4:1-2; 5:18,27-41), continually found comfort in the words of the Master, "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matthew 5:10-12). Peter, desiring these to be faithful to the end, gave similar instruction to those whom he almost certainly had a direct hand in converting to Christ. "*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf*" (I Peter 4:14-16).

Seeking to exhort the saints to endure the heaviness of tribulations (I Peter 1:6) Peter emphasized the very unique qualities and characteristics that they possessed as Christians, "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...*" (I Peter 2:9). In addition to encouraging first century Christians to endure the persecution of their detractors this enduring declaration also helps us to realize our self-worth as Christians, that we may be conscious of who we are as God's people thereby finding strength to live faithfully and serve as valuable workers in the kingdom of God.

Consider first the fact that as Christians we are a "chosen generation." This phrase literally means as "elect family" or "a family of the best kind." Christians are the best of any family because they are God's family (Ephesians 2:19; 3:15; I Timothy 3:15), and they are an elect family because they have been chosen to salvation. Now, contrary to Calvinism, no one individual has been elected or "predestinated" to be saved (or lost) from the beginning of time. All who are Christians are a part of an "elect class," which class God determined to save from the foundation of the world. God did not predestinate who would be in this "elect class," rather He predestinated how one is to get into this elect class and what the reward for those in it will be at the day of judgment. "*But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (II Thessalonians 2:13-14). Paul declared that God "from the beginning" chose to save man "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." That is to say, we are sanctified by faith and obedience of the truth revealed to man by the Holy Spirit. Having believed and obeyed the gospel we obtain salvation and "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" which shall be revealed at His return (I Peter 1:5; 5:50; c. II Timothy 2:10).

Second, Peter calls Christians a "royal priesthood." Christians, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and servants of Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, are a

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The Book of Beginnings PM

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kingly, or royal people. Further, serving under Jesus who is our High Priest (Hebrews 3:1), we stand as a “kingly body of priests.” Therefore, we have the distinct privilege of worshiping God as priests through the High Priesthood of Jesus. Under the law of Moses only the priests (who were from the chosen family of Levi) were set apart to tend to the things pertaining to the tabernacle [house of God] (Numbers 1:48-50). Christians are an elect or chosen family (even as the Levites) and only those of that elect family of God have been set apart from the world in order to serve in the royal priesthood. Only Christians have the right and privilege to worship the God of heaven.

Third, Peter refers to Christians as a “holy nation.” Christians are literally “a most holy race of people.” We are holy because we have been dedicated for a sacred purpose. We are most holy because the purpose to which we have been dedicated pertains to the God of heaven. The word “nation” is from the Greek word “ethnos” from which we get our word “ethnic.” Man breaks the human race into various ethnic groups, but God takes people of all ethnic backgrounds and puts them into one “nation” set apart for His purpose. Hence, Christians are an elect family of God set apart from the world for the purpose of worshiping and serving God as one race of people.

Finally, Peter declares that as Christians we are a “peculiar people.” Many abuse this term and claim that as “peculiar” people we should stand out, not simply in morals and spiritual practice, but in dress as well. In other words the world should be able, simply by physical appearance, to determine that we are Christians, I.e., we should be “oddballs” to the world. Not only is this a gross misinterpretation of the text but such an attitude is demeaning to the very name Christian! Certainly we should conduct our lives in such a way that we are noted as godly people and we should wear such clothing that is modest. However, this passage does not address either of these aspects of the Christian life. The phrase “peculiar people” translates from a phrase meaning “a people of possession,” in fact, the American Standard Version (1901) translates this phrase as “a people for God’s own possession.” As Christians we belong to God, we are not our own (I Corinthians 6:19-20). We have been bought with a price, the value of which cannot be estimated by man. The apostle Paul affirmed that we were “*purchased*” with the very blood of God (Acts 20:28), and Peter makes clear that this blood was the blood of Christ, which blood is “*precious*” and “*without blemish and without spot*” (I Peter 1:19).

Who are we? What is our self-worth? As Christians we are the elect family of God set apart from the world that we might worship and serve God as one race of people whom God has purchased with His own blood. What is our purpose? The remainder of I Peter 2:9 states that as this chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, and peculiar people we are to “*show forth (make public) the praises (virtue or moral goodness) of him (God) who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*” Who are we? We are Christian; God’s children; God’s servants; God’s possession. There is none like us in all the earth!

-Ronnie Scherffius

THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

The Genesis, “the beginning.” The first book recorded in the inspired, inerrant, and in comparable word of God, the holy scriptures. Its history, background, and placement in the Bible is of the utmost interest, especially given the ignorance so many in the world have regarding the events and topics that Genesis records. Genesis not only records the beginning of the universe and mankind but also of “covenants between God and man, names, marriage, family life, sin, redemption, moral order, worship, sacrifices, nations, government, occupations, music, literature, art, agriculture, mechanics, cities, languages, godless civilization, divine punishment of the wicked, the Hebrew race, and the Messianic line” (Dunn). Its importance, not only to the Christian’s faith, but also to man’s understanding of his origin and history, is beyond the description of words.

Moses, though authored by the Spirit of God, penned Genesis in all likelihood between 1440-1400 B.C. It records events from the creation of the heavens and the earth, in approximately 4004 B.C., to the death of Joseph in Egypt, around the mid-1500s B.C., meaning it covers a span of about 2,500 years (dates according to Ussher). When understanding that the rest of the Old Testament combined records only about 1,500 years the wonder of Genesis begins to unfold. It records some of the most important events in history (including the flood, the call of Abraham, the promise to Isaac, and Jacob’s family in Egypt) and covers more time than any other book ever, but its detail is of such nature as to provide adequate information for man’s understanding. Surely this is not the work of any man as many “scholars” would claim, attempting to discredit its factual account of creation and the Noahic flood to support the dangerous theory of evolution, but truly it is inspired of God (II Timothy 3:16).

The theme of Genesis has properly been said to be man’s relationship with God (Dunn). God had created man to serve Him in unending bliss in the paradise of Eden, but when man failed God, the Lord then began the chain of events that would allow man to serve Him in unending bliss in the paradise of Heaven (Genesis 2:1-3:15). However, not only does it records the general relationship of man to God, but Genesis goes on to record specific men and how they individually related to God.

The means through which man knew God’s will and performed it was through a patriarchal system. The patriarchs were set up in two categories in the book of Genesis: antediluvian and post-diluvium. The antediluvian patriarchs, those before the flood, consisted of all those named in the genealogical record of Genesis 5, from Adam to Noah and are noted for their long spans of life. The post-diluvium patriarchs, those after the flood, consisted of all men from Noah’s sons until the Mosaic law was given in Exodus 20, but included those famous fathers of the Jews: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a patriarch, “The father was recognized as both legal and spiritual head of the family. Wives and children were dependent upon the father, or patriarch, of the family, who also served as its governor, priest, and magistrate. The family, including its slaves, was subject to the patriarch, who represented the sole authority, under God” (Pfeiffer).

Having been written in the course of the forty year wilderness wandering just before entering Canaan, the immediate purpose of this record was to give Israel an account of their national origin and covenant with God, but even more so their origin from creation and their spiritual relationship with God (Dunn). However, outside of its immediate purpose during the time it was written is its purpose unto man today; that is to tell man where he came from and begin to relate how he got to where he is today both socially and spiritually. There is much to be learned from how events transpired either for the good or bad of the people in Genesis and how mankind can, but sadly has not, learn from those examples and made more spiritually educated decisions.

Perhaps the most important part of every book of the Bible is how Christ is pictured in that book because He is in every one; and in Genesis He is pictured as a promise. In Genesis 3:15 He is the promised seed of woman; in Genesis 22:18 He is the promised seed of Abraham to bless all nations; and in Genesis 49:10 He is the promised Shiloh who would come through the tribe of Judah.

The book of Genesis, from its antiquity, has been of the utmost importance to all mankind for his learning and understanding. May this great book never be considered without value but always be a priceless tool that students of the Bible, until the end of time, investigate with interest and desire.

-Andy Brewer

The bride came down the aisle, and when she reached the front where the groom was, she saw that he had his golf bag and clubs by his side. She said, “What are your golf clubs doing here?” He looked her right in the eye and said, “This isn’t going to take all day, is it?”