

# **Sermon: Chosen by God**

**Text: I Peter 2:4-12**

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**August 3, 2008**

**Introduction:** On November 4th many of us will be voting and deciding on our *choice* for the next President of the United States. Some of you might say, “Well, there isn’t much of a choice.” And in some ways I think you are correct. You have to know over the next three months the rhetoric is going to get ugly on both sides. I remember an old humorous bumper sticker (well, humorous, if you are Republican): “If Clinton is the answer - it must have been a dumb question.”

As significant as national elections may be, even to the world, all the questions about our government and its future pale in importance to the spiritual decisions we make every day. The choices of whom we will follow spiritually are critical to our destiny (v. 8).

Within our Brotherhood there is usually a pretty lively discussion as to what we ought to call our preachers. You hear titles like Pastor, evangelist, minister, senior minister, equipping minister, brother - and the list is certainly growing as we speak. I personally prefer “Your Emminence,” or just Gary - most days, or “Wackdog.”

Maybe the idea of calling each other “priest” would be a better title that we all could agree on. It certainly has biblical support in our text. The only needed distinction would be that Jesus is the High Priest for all of us.

**I Peter 2:4-12 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— <sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>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.” <sup>7</sup>Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, “ <sup>8</sup>and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup>Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

**How many priests do we have here this morning? What a headline for the local newspapers: priests come to worship at First Christian Church!**

**Many of the choices that are made in this world are out of our hands. I am especially glad that God has chosen us. And He did that before we even knew Him.**

**So, everyone, who is a follower of Christ, is a priest! I also hope you understand the implications of that vocation. I want to focus in on the familiar verse 9. Look at the parallelism in the front of this verse.**

**I Peter 2:9 (NIV) <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

**But what are our duties because:**

## **I. God Has Chosen Us Out of Darkness (the world).**

**This means God has chosen us to be different from the world. God has chosen us to be priests and serve His Son, Jesus, the High Priest. Priests are no longer those from some elite clan or those lucky enough to be born into the right family, but all those who have responded to the grace of God.**

**We were changed when we were saved and brought out of the world, and we dare no longer behave as we once did.**

**I Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV) <sup>9</sup>Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders <sup>10</sup>nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

**And now because of Jesus, all who have been washed by Jesus' blood are priests. Our purpose is clear. It is: **“that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.”****

### **A. For the purpose of service**

**We'll talk of vocalizing praise toward God in a moment, but certainly “declaring our praise to God must be more than lip-service.**

**Mark 7:6 (NIV) <sup>6</sup>He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.**

**Psalms 34:12-14 (NIV)** <sup>12</sup> Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, <sup>13</sup> keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. <sup>14</sup> Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

There are many varied ministries within the Church and not all are centered around words. Many of our committees serve the Lord. And those ministries are just as valuable to God as what I might do.

Now - don't take this as whining, but in some churches there is too much pressure on just the minister "to do things." Our Movement has historically been known for their debates with the Roman Catholic Church. We have insisted, since Luther, on the "priesthood of *all* believers."

Even though some of our theology is significantly different, we are more like them in practice than any of us would want to admit. In our churches, many times, you will see only certain people pray. Only men pass the sacred offering plates and communion ware. Too many times there is little place for women in ministry even though Scripture never prohibits much of what we keep for "men only."

I sometimes wish Paul in **Romans 16** would have been more specific about the duties of Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, and Julia - and how it was they assisted the Apostle Paul in ministry.

God Has Chosen Us Out of Darkness (the world)...

**B. For the purpose of speaking.**

You've heard this, I believe: "It is not what you say that counts, it is what you do." Jesus even speaks parables about following through in action on spoken promises.

Speaking is important, it simply cannot be devoid of service. Yet, we will have missed the point, if all we do is "do things" and never "say things."

I find among most churches such an awful silence. People do not speak their faith.

**(Fred Craddock had said something like the following:)** Someone from some other group comes and knocks on your door and you're standing at the door. And here is somebody witnessing for some religious group that you've never heard of. You've been in church all your life, and they're just piling up scriptures all around you, up to your ears. And all you can think of is "Jesus wept." Now what do I say? I need some scripture; I need some scripture. I've been in church 40, 50, 60 years and have nothing to say.

**You know one reason we don't have anything to say?**

**Many times when you go into churches, there is one Sunday School class that is a lecture type. Somebody stands up there and lectures for thirty minutes and takes an offering and sings "Bless Be the Tie that Binds," and then we go out to the sanctuary.**

**There's another class where they have an open discussion about the Bible. And you'll hear someone say: "I don't want to go into one of those classes, I just like to hear so-and-so talk." Come on folk! When you cut through all that, don't we want to be able to say: "This is what I believe!"**

**We make a lot of excuses like: "Well, it's not what you say that counts, it's what you do." Well, what have you been doing? Well, nothing, but it's what you say that counts. And deep down we realize that "saying it" is the hardest part of all.**

**There are a lot of men who will buy flowers and candy rather than say, "I love you." "Well, Ben, why don't you just say you love me?" "Oh, just eat your candy!" What's so difficult about it? I'll tell you what's difficult - the most difficult deed you will ever perform is to say something extremely important.**

## **II. God Has Chosen Us to Declare His Praises.**

### **A. In good times**

**Our lives as well as our assemblies ought to be filled with praise. Our services ought to be, whenever possible, upbeat, celebrative, encouraging and we can do that without being untrue to our tradition. Being ready and willing to praise our Lord is not at odds with what God has in mind for His people.**

**A time of testimony and sharing how God works in our lives is certainly appropriate. We ought to want to share all the blessings given to us. That is often easier in small groups like Sunday School and Bible studies.**

**It is our task to share the Good News as difficult as that may be for some. As priests we have a definite responsibility for the Word of God.**

**C.S. Lewis, from his *Reflections on the Psalms*, shares with us: It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with."**

The Psalms are good at expressing what we struggle to say:

**Psalms 9:14 (NIV)** <sup>14</sup> that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation.

**Psalms 71:15 (NIV)** <sup>15</sup> My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure.

**Psalms 73:28 (NIV)** <sup>28</sup> But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

**Psalms 79:13 (NIV)** <sup>13</sup> Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

**Psalms 107:22 (NIV)** <sup>22</sup> Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.

**Psalms 119:13, 26 (NIV)** <sup>13</sup> With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. <sup>26</sup> I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees.

And the Psalter ends with: **Psalms 150:6 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

God's purpose in redeeming us is not simply for our own enjoyment, but that we may praise Him forever.

God Has Chosen Us to Declare His Praises ...

B. In bad times

Talk about Wayne from Monticello ...

and Jack from Midland (I believe in God)...

The people that have made the biggest impression on me have been those who suffered the most pain, but whose joyful faith stayed the course.

### III. God Has Chosen Us to Respond to His Mercy.

A. To abstain from sinful desires (it's a war out there).

Christians living in an unbelieving society must try to avoid sinful desires and maintain lives that are a good example for others to follow. This is so unbelievers can be saved and have God glorified. There is no reason why this strategy would not work in every church - if it were implemented (see Grudem commentary, p. 117.)

Paul's advice to the Romans was: **Romans 12:21 (NIV)** <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Peter starts with the assumption that the first and most immediate conflict is with the believer. That is, between the natural impulses toward survival and acceptance and the believer's new life that has been focused on God.

Paul told us of his struggles between the flesh and the spirit. He does not do what he knows he should and does things he knows he shouldn't (Romans 7:21ff.) Sound familiar? But thanks be to God for His being rich in mercy and his readiness to forgive as we get wounded in the battle.

### **B. To be good**

This is primarily not for selfish reasons, i.e. just so I can be saved, but also so others might be attracted to Jesus as well.

It is Jesus who makes all the difference in our living. Living hope, living stones can only be produced by a LIVING GOD. Water, bread and wine take on a new significance in the hands of our living God.

Even disobedience and death are no match for a living God. He is able to forgive and resurrect us to new life. He is able to do much more than we can both ask or imagine.

As God's priests we dare not live our lives in some monastic order, tucked away from the world, taking vows of silence. We need to be both seen and heard to display a credible witness for the Truth.

**Conclusion:** There has been a change in God's localized presence. It was thought once that God dwelt in a tent, and then in a temple fashioned by hands, BUT NOW God lives in a spiritual house made up of living stones, built on the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. He lives in us today - if we are Christians!

There has been a change in the priesthood from the OT until now. No longer does the priesthood consist of a special order or gender of people. It consists of everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. We are to be holy as He is holy! What a great and wonderful privilege to serve our Lord.

Since God has made such a remarkable organizational change, the Church ought to reflect it! Let's make sure as we all serve as priests for a holy God that we exclude no one from areas that have been opened by our Lord.

**Lastly, sacrifices no longer are formalized, but they are gifts directed by the Holy Spirit in response to the mercy we have been extended through Jesus Christ. Hallelujah, what a Savior!**

**Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.