Our privileges and responsibilities

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[0:00] In the first letter of Peter, the second chapter, the ninth verse. First Peter, chapter 2, verse 9.

It is written, that ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation of a truly people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
In this letter, the apostle Peter is addressing the scattered church. In this letter, Christians scattered, we are told at the beginning of chapter 1, throughout Pontus, Erecia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bethlehemia.
Christians who have been outwitted from their homes and driven to seek refuge elsewhere, probably as a result of the persecutions during the reign of the Emperor Nero.
They are afflicted to their persecutions. They are being separated from their families perhaps, certainly from their places where they used to stay. They are ruthless and they are beginning to wonder what's happening to them.
[1:33] What is it all about? What is the cause of life behind the crucifixion that has had such a traumatic effect? upon their life.

And to these scattered Christians, many of whom were originally doomed, we can see that, confused, which we find in the course of the letter, to these Christians, Peter addresses a word of encouragement, and of challenge, and of hope.
And he brings to them a word which explains to them what's happening to them, and gives them something to hold on to in the face of their trial.
And that's why you and I, we may pass through our times, certainly not the persecution here, but we have our suffering, our personal, domestic trials, trials which afflict us as we see the state of Christ's church and Scotland.
And that we are aware of how the cause of the gospel is not flourishing as we would like to see it flourish, perhaps once as did in our beloved land.
[2:51] We are now persecuted, but we are faced with indifference and opportunity. And sometimes we begin to wonder what's happening. Where is it all we need? Is God, has God anything to say to us?

In this situation in which we live. So it may be that the word of Peter, to these scattered Christians of all, is a word to us, in our own days, and in our own situations.
So I want to look today at the text which we've taken, and I want to see first of all what Peter says to these Christians there, in these scattered places, about the privileges which we enjoy in the church.
And then more briefly we'll look at the responsibilities which accompanies these Christians. First of all the privileges of the Christian church. The Christian church is in a bad way.
It seems to be on the run. Christians are persecuted and being scattered. It's belonging to the church, really anything if any, volunteers are beginning to wander in their most cynical days.
[4:04] It just speaks to them, as he speaks to us, of the privileges which we have, belonging to the church of Christ. And he says, he's speaking of course to Christian believers.

He says, you are a chosen generation. He's contrasting the you with those in the previous dress, those who are disobedient, those for whom Christ and his gospel are a stone of stumbling and a rock of a thing.
And he says to these scattered Christians, he says, you who believe, you are, in numbers, one or two privileges which they enjoy in the church of Christ. And he says, you are, first of all, a chosen generation.

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Now each of these privileges, very interestingly, are quotations from the Old Testament. Most of them are from the chapter which we read from Exodus 19.
And they relate to the privileges which belong to the Jewish nation, to the Old Testament church. And what Peter is doing here is saying, look at your history. Remember what's happened before.
[5:21] Look at what God did in times past to the Jews. The same blessings which belong to the Jews under the Old Testament are now the blessings which belong to the church of Christ in the New Testament.

And the first of these blessings, the first of these privileges, is that they are a chosen generation. Now the Jews were a chosen generation.
They were chosen by God. Among all the peoples of the ancient world, the Jews stand unique and single. Not because they were a great military in power, they weren't.
When they went to war, they usually got into trouble. Not because they were a great political force, because they weren't. Not because they were a mighty people in terms of population, they were a very small nation.
Not because they were great in terms of philosophy or worldly wisdom. They were unique because they alone knew the living God. They alone received a revelation of God's grace.
[6:29] God made himself known to them. God made himself known to them. God made himself known to them. We don't know why. God made himself known to them. We don't know why. We can't explain in human terms. Why God should choose this one nation. They weren't even a very obedient nation.

We can only say with the rhyme, how odd of God to choose the Jews. But it's true. He did. And because he chose the Jews, the whole history of the human race has been altered.
And Peter says to the Christians to whom he's writing, what God did for the Jews, he's done for you. He's chosen you. He's taken you out of the nations round about.
He set his mark upon you. He's made you different. He's brought you into the church. Just as the Jews are no better or no different from the other nations in Old Testament time.
So you says Peter to these Christians and to us today. So you are no different. We are just the same. We are no better.
[7:33] We are no worse. We are no less sinful. We are no more righteous than other people. Yet God in his grace has chosen us and brought us into his church.

If we are Christians, we are Christians because God has chosen us. Because God set in motion the series of circumstances that led to our conversion.
Perhaps he put us into our Christian family. None of us chose the families into which we were born. Where from our earliest days we heard the gospel. Perhaps he brought us to meet a certain individual whose Christian life impressed us.
So we wanted to know how they ticked. And we discovered that what made them ticked was Jesus Christ. Perhaps someone invited us to our service in church. Where we well used to go.
And we came along. That day we heard the gospel. And life has never been the same sin. The circumstances which led to our conversion. Are the circumstances that God has ordained.
[8:44] We are chosen by God. But secondly, we are our chosen generation. And this word generation is the word seed or offspring.

Word which we find very often in the Old Testament. Now what Peter is saying here is that we are of divine descent.
We are the offspring begotten of God. He is our father to whom we stand as spiritual children. You are sons of God, says Paul to the Galatians through faith in Jesus Christ.
Not only has God chosen us, but he has made us his offspring, his seed, his children. He is our father. We are his adopted sons and daughters.
We belong to his family. Now you and I, if we were sons and daughters of God, if we are members of his family, then we are sons and daughters of God together.
[9:52] And we are all members of the same family. Therefore we should show to one another the love that families should show to one another.

They don't always do that, I know. But they should. I was at a family funeral last week. And I met people there whom I hadn't met since the last family funeral.
And I met members of my family, some of whom I hadn't seen for 20 years. And as we were talking together at the eve after the service, we were remonting the fact that we only meet together on

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these occasions.
And I said, well that's true. But let's be grateful that when we do meet, there's a family spirit among us. And we are not fighting.
There are families who when they meet, be it at marriages or funerals, are always at each other's throne. And that's a great thing. Is that true of this family? Of you and of me, as fellow children, as offspring of God.
[10:57] If you and I belong to the same family, then you and I should have concern for the good name of the family. We should be concerned that we don't let the family die.

That the family reputation is safe in our families. We need to make sure in all that we do that the family of God are not brought to shame or disrepute by what we say or what we do.
Then secondly, Peter says of these Christians that the church is a royal priesthood. And again that phrase comes from Exodus 19.
Now the Old Testament church, you remember, was identified with the state of Israel. And the state of Israel and latterly the state of Judah was our monarchy with our king latterly.
There's our king on the throne. And the Old Testament church had an elaborate structure of services and sacrifices offered exclusively by the priests.
[12:05] That was their job. Now, priests descended spiritually from Aaron, priests from the tribe of Levi, set aside for this office. There were kings in the Old Testament and there were priests.

But the office of king and the office of priest was never held by the same person. Except by, the only exception to that is that man, Melchizedek, we meet in Genesis.
And then Jesus Christ came. And he combined in himself the offices of king and a priest. He is both our king and our high priest.
And he is also our prophet. And Peter says in the New Testament, there's not just one king and a small number of priests drawn from one particular tribe.
All Christians are kings. And all Christians are priests. Remember what it says in Revelation chapter 1.
[13:11] To him who loves us and does feed us from our sins by his blood. And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. To him be glory and power forever and ever.

We are a kingdom of priests. What does this mean in practical terms? How are we a kingdom? How are we kings?
Well, we are kings because we are heirs of our royal inheritance. We are kings. An inheritance which first of all is our present possession.
If we are children of God, then we are heirs and joint heirs with Christ. We are members of the royal family. The royal blood flows in our kingdom.
We already possess kingship. You and I are richer beyond all the passing wealth of this world.
[14:15] We are kings indeed. It's not in a storybook. It's reality. The poorest Christian in material terms is richer beyond compare with the wealthiest millionaire on earth who is outside Christ.

All things are yours as Paul in 1 Corinthians 3. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the future.
All are yours and you are Christ's. Christ is God. Everything that we have, everything that surrounds us is for our advantage, works for our good.
Now, we may not see that. We may not understand that now. But we are kings. And everything, even our trials and afflictions, are ultimately for our benefit.
It's our present possession. But also it's our promised possession. We possess it partly now, but we will possess it fully hereafter. We are heirs and joint heirs of Christ, of our heavenly inheritance that awaits us.
[15:30] For Peter speaks of it in the previous chapter, verse 4, An inheritance incorruptible and undefined, that fades not away, but it's ours in heaven for us.

We don't understand what it means to reign as kings in heaven. But it means, first of all, it means a victorious existence.
Whatever else it means, it means that we will be victorious. We will be finally triumphant over the sins and failings which fought and frustrate us here. And it means that we will be standing in judgment.
Do you not know, says Paul, that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we will judge England? I don't know what these verses mean. I can't understand what it means to judge the world

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and judge England.
Paul doesn't explain himself. But I know that it means that there will be power and authority for us into which we will enter in heaven, far exceeding our present normal.
[16:41] Secondly, the churches aren't priesthood. We are all priests. Every single one of us who is a true Christian is a priest. Now there are two ideas involved in the Bible, in the idea, concept of priesthood.

One is the idea of access to God. Now, you know that in the Old Testament, the Jews were unable, the worshippers were unable to come directly into the presence of God.
That's why they needed a priest. That's why they needed someone to stand in that place before him. We saw that illustrated in the chapter which we read from Exodus 19.
When the people of Israel were drawing near to meet with God on Mount Sinai. And Moses was told, put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, be careful that you don't go up the mountain or touch the foot of it.
Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. And again in chapter 24 of Exodus, we are told the same thing.
[17:54] We are told in Exodus 24, verse 1, Moses said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel, you are to worship at a distance.

But Moses alone is to approach the Lord. The people couldn't come near God. Only Moses was able to draw near to God. And the same idea was found, you remember, in the services of the tabernacle.
You remember there that only the high priest was able to go into the holy of holies on the day of atonement as representative of the people. And you only did that once again.
And Peter says, now you are all priests. You don't have to wait for someone else to do it for you. You can go into the presence of God anytime you like.
Draw near to God. And he will draw near to you. You don't have to wait for the day of atonement for the high priest to go into God's presence for you.
[19:00] You can go here and now. That's what these verses in Hebrews 12 mean. You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire, to darkness, gloom and storm.

To a trumpet blaster to such a voice speaking words, that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because he could not bear what was commanded.
Even an animal touches the mountain it must be stowed. The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, and so on.
To Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new one. And you and I, we have access to God. We can come to God at any time. Through Jesus Christ. Knowing that we are accepted by God.
Knowing that he will receive us. Knowing that he will draw near to us. If we draw near to him. And then there's the idea of sacrifice.
[20:03] The priests offer the sacrifice. And you and I, we are priests and we have to offer sacrifice. What the sacrifices do. Not the sacrifices of bulls and goats.

But what Peter calls in verse 5, spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. What are these sacrifices? Well, first of all, there's the sacrifice of our bodies and our personalities.
I urge you to fall to the Romans in view of God's mercy. To offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual sacrifice.
And you and I, our priests, we have to offer on the altar of God the sacrifice of our whole life. In consecrated obedience to his will and to his son.
In consecrated obedience to his will and to his son. Then there's the sacrifice of prayer. The book of Revelation speaks of golden bowls full of incense. Which are the prayers of the saints.
[21:08] Incense which accompany the sacrifice. To sweeten the smell. And Revelation speaks of the prayers of the saints. As incense as part of a sacrifice.

Then we have to offer the sacrifice of tenet. You do not delight in sacrifice. In physical sacrifice or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
The sacrifice of God, says the psalmist, that our broken spirit. Our broken and a contrite heart. You will not despise. That's another sacrifice that you and I are spring.
The sacrifice of our broken and uptenant heart. To God. Then the sacrifice of praise. Through Jesus Christ, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

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The fruit of lips that confess his name. And then there's the sacrifice of good works. Don't forget to do good and to share with others.
[22:09] Says the right of the Hebrews. For with such sacrifices, God is peace. And Paul says to the Philippians, I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.

They are a fragrant offering, a sacrifice, pleasing to God. The good works that you and I perform, by God's help, they are a sacrifice.
You and I are priests. Are we exercising our priestly office faithfully? Are we taking full advantage of the right of access that we are given to God?
Do we realize that in Christ we are accepted by God? That we can draw near to him knowing that he will draw near to us? The Old Testament sacrifices were offered by the priests regularly, daily, or whatever it was, of the fixed festivals of the evening.
The sacrifices that I have outlined, these spiritual sacrifices, are we offering them regularly as part of our daily weekly routine? Are they part of the daily weekly routine of this congregation?
[23:15] And of everyone who belongs to you? These sacrifices, the Old Testament sacrifices were costly. They involved the giving of an animal. They involved the shedding of blood.

How sacrificial are our spiritual sacrifices. And are we conscious friends that we are all priests? This sacrificing is the responsibility of each one of us.
It's not something which we leave to the minister. It's not something which we leave to the elder. It's not something which we leave to the keen Christians. It's something that all who profess the name of Christ have a responsibility to do.
Because we are all priests. The minister may have his special responsibility. The elder may have his special responsibility. You and I all have our responsibilities as priests before God.
And then Peter calls the church our holy nation. God called Israel to be holy. And made a covenant with them for this.
[24:17] He didn't call the Jews because they were our holy people. He called them to make them our holy people. He didn't call us into his church because we were holy people.

He called us into his church to make us holy men and women. His word holy, his basic significance is separate, different, distinguished.
God is holy because he's totally different from anything that he's created. God calls us to be a holy nation in this church.
To stand different, to stand separate from the world for his own use. God calls us to remain holy. This is the dynamic for our personal sanctification.
We were talking about sanctification in our evening services recently. services received. And we have to remind ourselves that this is God's work but it's also our work. We are to be what God has made us. God has made us our holy nation. God has set us apart and we have to live and we have to work out the implications of that divine consecration in our own lives and in the context of our own daily experience.
[25:37] When a teenager behaves in a childish manner we say to that teenager, come on grow up, be your age, stop behaving like a baby. That's what we have to do. We are a holy nation and we have to behave like that. We just stop behaving like the world around us. We have to behave as those who are different, as those who are separate to God.

But that separateness, what is it to do? It's not to be the separateness of the scribes and the Pharisees. For those who despise Jesus because he aches with Republicans and sinners. The separateness which refuses to have contact with the sinful world unless we are contaminated. And so cuts itself off. The separateness of the Pharisee of the hermit of the medieval monk. Rather we have to have the separateness of Jesus Christ.
Not avoiding contact with our world and its sin but rather seeking to use the contacts God gives us in a careful and prayerful and diligent way. To show to the world around us in its sin that there's a better way. The way of Jesus Christ. The way of holiness.
And then fourthly, Peter says of the church that we are a peculiar people. Well some of us are very peculiar but that's not the sense of the word in which the Apostle used to say. The word peculiar here means a particular people. We are a people which belong particularly and exclusively to God. We are his particular treasure. We are precious before him. Why are we precious? Well I don't know. All I can say in the authority of his word that we are.

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That the church is very precious to Jesus Christ. It may be despised by the world but not by the cynics of our day and age. But in the eyes of God and after all and the end of the day it's God alone who comes. It's very precious.
[27:46] So precious that he paid for it. He purchased the church in the most expensive car by the blood of his own dear son.

The whole of the world is his. The whole of the universe belongs to him. The thousand decathlon a thousand hills. The whole earth belongs to the Lord.
Who made him. But of all that the Lord has made that which is dearest to his heart is his own branch and people. His own child. What's your dearest possession? I don't know. But I know this that you and I if we are Christ's we are God's dearest possession.
So dear that we are his habitation. That he lives among us. For God of Zion has made choice. There he desires to dwell.
We are his possessions and we use them. You have possessions at home don't you? And you use them. You use them for the purposes for which they are intended. You use your cups and saucers for drinking tea or coffee.
[29:07] You use your lawn mower for cutting your grass. Your possessions are there for your use. We are there for God. We are his possessions. Not to please ourselves. Not to do what we want to do.

But for God is pleased to do as leaders get work to do. That we are his congregation. Are we God's possessions? Are we available to him to do what he would have us to do?
So these are the privileges. But also more briefly, Peter speaks of responsibility. These are great words of encouragement to us friends.
In days of silence. But there are also responsibilities that go with us. Which we may not and dare not be given.
It is ours to proclaim the praises of him who called us out of time into his marvellous life. All these things that he has given to us.
[30:17] All these things that he has given to us. Chosen us. Made us kings and priests. Set us apart. Consecrated us. Purchased us and ridden us.

And for this basic purpose that we may show forth his glory and his praise. Which called us out of darkness into his marvellous life.
Once we were in darkness. The darkness of sin. Now by grace we are in life. In gospel life.
And it is our responsibility to show forth the praises of him who brought us from the one into the other. And to proclaim to the world. We are to be heralds.
That's what the word proclaim means. But we don't have heralds nowadays. I suppose the nearest modern equivalent to a herald is our newsreader on the television. You and I are to be newsreaders to the world.
[31:21] The world of Campbell. The world of Oslo. The world of Kilwinning. Whatever it is God in his providence has placed us. You and I have a responsibility to be newsreaders. To read to the world.

The news for you. The news of the praises. That word means the excellence. The excellencies of our God. The God who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous life.
It's our responsibility. To show the world. Not what we are but what he has done in us and for us. And is continuing to do with us.
So that those who are still in darkness may see and marvel at their greatness. At the excesses of our God. And that's our prior motivation in this congregation.
To show forth in our lives that yes we were in darkness but now we are in light because of what our God has done. And to tell those around us.
[32:27] By our lives. By what we are as a congregation this individual. By what our God has done. And what he is able to do for them. So that they will say.

What a wonderful God this is. He did it for them. He can do it for me too. And you are a new leader. Are you a new leader? Are you a fellow? Are you showing forth the praise of him who called us? Perhaps you haven't yet. He's called out of darkness into light. Perhaps you are still in darkness. Perhaps this is all very strange to me. Or these privileges that belong to the church. They belong to you as to you. And you can have them and you can enjoy them how? By faith in Jesus Christ. By coming to him. The one whom God has appointed.

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To be the savior of sin. And if you are in darkness. Then there is love. You are still in darkness. Perhaps you are still in darkness.
Perhaps you are still in darkness. Perhaps you are still in darkness. Perhaps this is all very strange to me. If you're in darkness, then there is light.
[33:29] And there is hope for you through Jesus Christ. But if you're a Christian, then this is true of you. You have been called from light, darkness into light.

And your responsibility, first and foremost, is to show forth what an excellent God you would have. We have.
That's our responsibility here in this country. Our first priority is not to fill the church. It's not to sustain a spirit of fellowship in the congregation.
It's not to support one another. Particularly in times of difficulty. These things are all very desirable and important. These are sexual. The first priority that the word of God lays upon God's people is that we show forth the glory and the essence of our God will call us out of darkness.
Thank you. Jesus, may God be so Yaakov, Amen. With one we give thanks for the gospel, for all the privileges which are ours in the fellowship of Thy Christ.
[34:48] Help us Lord to know that life comes in class. And having received that life Lord, He promised we pray everything that would prevent us, showing forth Thy glory in us.

May we all be heralds with victory. Thou's places in different places, different situations, among different contexts. May others see our good works. May others see what Thou has done for us. And may their hearts be brought to you, to seek peace, that God is our lowly able to seek. And we think this is awesome.

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