

DEVOTIONS

WHO YOU WERE IS NOT WHO YOU ARE

There is an old hymn that goes, "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame. For 'twas on that old cross the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain. So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, 'till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown." This old hymn expresses the truth that the cross is the central event in history and that the cross is at the heart of the Christian life. The 'cross' is the symbol for our Lord's sacrificial death, atoning for all our sins. Because of His death on the cross for me, the Father accepts me as His child and heir. Because of His bearing my punishment, I am free from punishment both now and on judgment day. And all of this is mine by simple child-like faith in the 'cross.'

When I was born, I was not in this state of grace and fellowship with God. Through water and the Word I have been brought into the family of God. Peter states what my exalted position is that who I was is not who I am now, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." I Pet. 2:9-10 My condition has been completely changed by the cross.

YOU ARE A CHOSEN RACE

For example, there are certain leading tribes in Nigeria which think that they are the chosen ones to rule the country. The Hausa's consider themselves the chosen ones. The Fulani's view themselves as very adept in business and government. The Ibos some time ago were so convinced of their abilities to govern that they began a secession which brought on a civil war. We must also say of the Ibibios and their subdivisions that each has a high opinion of its group as opposed to others. In each case it is not that they are chosen by God, but chosen by themselves for their self-exalted position.

With us as Christians there is no such illusion. We know who we are. We are sinful by nature. The imagination of our hearts is evil from our youth. God in heaven can see our evil deeds, hear our evil words, and discern our evil thoughts, even though we try to hide the evil. We could hardly from this standpoint exalt ourselves and say that we are the chosen of God because of how good and great we are. Rather, we stand with head bowed and plead, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

Though not self-chosen, yet we are chosen, God has chosen us in Christ to be His children. Though we are inferior in every way, He bestows this honor on us. 'By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God and not of works, lest any man should boast.'

The mistake that the tribes make is that they designate themselves as a chosen race. God consigns all to sin and judgment. He creates a chosen race by the power of His Word. It is not a physical race, but a spiritual one. We are not born into our chosen status. We are adopted into it by God Himself.

Through infant baptism we are chosen by God and brought into His family by the washing of water by the Word. I cannot by my

own strength believe in Jesus Christ nor come to Him. God has converted me through the Word.

And what are we chosen for? Since we have been chosen by God in His love to be His children, we know Him and His love and are in turn to share it with others. We are the ones selected to show forth His glory. We are the ones to declare to this sin-darkened world the wonderful works of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

YOU ARE A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

Before ever we can consider how we are a royal priesthood, we must consider Jesus Christ as the great High Priest. The duty of the Old Testament priesthood was to offer sacrifices to God, in which the future sacrificial Lamb of God was pictured. The High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkle the blood on the mercy-seat. This once in the year sacrifice pictured how Jesus would once for all time sacrifice Himself. Jesus is our great High Priest who sacrificed His holy, precious blood on Calvary to cleanse us of sin. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Now, having ascended to the right hand of the Father as the resurrected Lord, He intercedes for us. He is our advocate with the Father. He sympathizes with us in our weaknesses, since He was tempted as we are, except He did not sin. This is why the author of Hebrews encourages us, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Heb. 4:16

Christ has appointed us as His royal priests. We were not born into this priesthood. In Old Testament times the sons of Levi were the hereditary priests. In New Testament times we become priests by appointment through faith. As Christ reconciled the world to God, so now He has appointed us as messengers of the reconciliation. "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." II Cor. 5:18-20

A priest was a go-between, a mediator. This is our position. As Christ came from the Father to bring sinful man together with holy God, so we are sent by Christ to bring the victorious message of Calvary from the Lord to the world.

Another duty we have is like that of Christ at the right hand of the Father. As He speaks to the Father for us, so we are to be intermediaries in prayer. Think of Abraham of old petitioning God for Lot. The prayers of a righteous man have great power in their effect.

YOU ARE A HOLY NATION

The idea of being holy is that we are set apart. We are set apart for Christ. The Lord taught that His disciples are to be in the world, but not of it. We may look like others in the world. We may dress like them. When it comes to words and actions there should be a marked difference. We serve a higher authority than any of this world. Christ rules us in the Kingdom of God on this earth. He rules us with His grace and mercy revealed to us in His Word.

While the world may be plunging headlong into disaster through its wicked foolishness, we of the holy nation are to be lights in the world reflecting the righteousness of God and His eternal love. Don't you ever feel out of place and awkward in this world? Doesn't it seem to you that things are not the way they should be? Of course you experience these feelings. This is the evidence in your heart that you are a foreigner here, an ambassador on service to Jesus. This world is not your permanent homeland, only a temporary area you are travelling through.

And you are not alone. You are part of a holy nation. Throughout this world wherever the name of Christ is confessed in simple child-like faith there is this holy nation, the Holy Christian Church. All Christians are one in Christ in the invisible Holy Christian Church. If at times we feel rather alone, remember the Lord's comfort to Elijah of how many others were like him, not bowing the knee to Baal.

Though united invisibly with all Christians in the universal Holy Christian Church,, yet we are not able to join with those who teach one or more doctrines contrary to the Word of God. Our separateness is enjoined on us in this way also by God through His Word. "I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them" Rom. 16:17 Our separateness is to be a testimony to false-teaching Christian churches that error should have no place in visible churches which call themselves Christian. Our allegiance to our Lord requires us to be separate from error in visible Christian churches, just as it requires us to be separate from the evil words and ways of this vile world groaning under sin.

YOU ARE GOD'S OWN PEOPLE

"...you are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." I Cor. 6:19-20 We have one master, the Christ. We are now by faith in Him His willing slaves. No oppressive force made us His and none keeps us as His own. We were made so by the Gospel of God's love for lost man in Christ Jesus. The relationship of slave to master is a dependency. So it is in our relationship to Him. We are totally dependent on Him and would have it no other way. Our life is hid in Him.

As our Master, we may go to Him for all our needs. As our Master, He provides in love all that we need for body and soul. Having laid down His life for us, He now lives and reigns as our King and Master.

Though we may be many, yet each of us is special to our Lord. None of us are lost in the crowd to Him. He knows us each by name. As a faithful shepherd knows his sheep, so our Master knows us. Each need is met as it is best for the individual. Each prayer is heard and answered. Each life is guarded and protected by His angels. Jesus is the personal Lord and Savior of each and every believer.

To such a Lord as this we owe our undying loyalty. In southern Africa there once was a detachment of soldiers called the King's Own African Rifles. They were loyal to their king. And their loyalty was expressed in their name. In many battles they fought as the King's Own. Today we must fight many spiritual battles. Only as the King's Own must we enter the battle. To fight the devil as anyone other than the King's Own is to court defeat. To wage war against evil without us being the King's Own is to assure eventual victory of evil over us. By faith in Jesus Christ we have been

drafted in the King's Own.

With spiritual weapons we wage the good fight of faith in order to finally lay hold of eternal life. Let us hold high the banner of our King, Jesus. Let us go forward as the King's Own and declare to any and all what a wonderful monarch we have in our Jesus. Let us seek to enlist others in His cause.

Thank the Lord that who we were is not who we are. Because of Calvary's cross we have become by faith in Christ His Own for all eternity.