

THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

1 Peter 2:1-12

Key Verse 2,9

“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.”

Thank God that he has blessed the GLEF 2020 and that we were allowed to study the book of Nehemiah and the prophets. Thank God that He has greatly encouraged the next generation through this forum by raising them up as self-motivated Bible teachers who serve His work through one-to-one Bible study in their generation and through whom God is doing spiritual reconstruction. Today we would like to study a special lesson from the first letter of Peter on the occasion of Daniel Elsholz and Rebekka Chang's change of school to grammar school and the enrolment of Abraham Tornau in primary school.

Peter encouraged the first Christians to be eager for the Word of God, the pure spiritual milk, and to overcome the sinful pagan influence. He encouraged them to build the spiritual house in the midst of persecution by laying themselves at the cornerstone of Jesus. They had the identity as the new people of God. They were the chosen royal priesthood, living holy in this world as God's property to proclaim God's good works in the world. They were now allowed to testify with their righteous lives that Christ had changed them, so that even the saints who slandered them might know God through them and repent to Him. May God strengthen our disciples to gain weight for their salvation through the pure spiritual milk of the Word of God and to live with the identity of a royal priest.

I. Crave pure spiritual milk (1-3)

It is believed that the first letter of Peter was sent from Rome at the time of the persecution of the Christians under Emperor Nero, who set fire to the city in 64 AD and blamed the Christians for it. In chapter 1 verse 1, Peter address-

es the recipients: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.” The letter was addressed to the Christians in the greater area of Turkey and Syria today. They lived under persecution and were scattered among the Gentiles. Many of them had lost everything. Some were desperate because of their faith that it cost so much. However, Peter did not try to comfort them humanly, but in chapter 1 he encouraged them to live a holy life with living hope.

In verse 1 of the second chapter he now says: “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” Christians were asked by him to rid themselves of some of the sins they were obviously beginning. In foreign lands they were probably strongly influenced by the pagans. Like them, they followed many bad sinful habits. They failed to live a holy life before God at that point. How can we live a life unaffected by the sinful world in the middle of the sinful world?

Verses 2 and 3 tell us this secret: “... Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Peter speaks here of drinking the spiritual milk to overcome the influence. Pure spiritual milk is the Word of God. The Word of God is pure, because it has power to change our inner being. Peter compares it to a baby sucking from its mother's breast with full strength. Mother's milk is also pure, so that small babies have hardly any bowel movements, because their digestion can easily process everything from the pure milk. Just as newborn babies suckle at their mother's breast with great strength for this good milk, so we should suck in the Word of God with

great pleasure. We are often tempted to say that we already know the text of the sermon when it is repeated. We routinely write our testimonies without thinking about the Word of God and so we do not find our concerns or ignore them. Many of us spend a lot of time on the news on the internet, on interesting books or on our WhatsApp or friends. Others are eager for sport. We must know, however, that those people who eat many things outside of the Bible in a quasi-desirous way are not connected to the spiritual source of power. Only those who study the Word of God again and again with renewed interest are the ones who increase for their salvation through the pure spiritual milk of the Word of God.

Other authors of the Bible also say that the Word of God is our source of strength. The psalmist writes in Psalms 1:2,3: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." God blesses the one who plants himself by the streams of water of the Word of God and his life will be well spent. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17 we read: "and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." We are educated by God's word, so that we may grow spiritually great. In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel himself was supposed to prophesy to dead bones. Even dead bones increase in size for their salvation through the pure spiritual milk of God's Word and come to life again and are raised up as a great army: " So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army." (Ezekiel 37:10)

May God help our schoolchildren, especially those who are going to a new school or have just started school, to overcome the spirit of the times at their school by being eager for the pure spiritual milk. The closer we are to the pagans, the more we have to fight spiritually. The more we are scattered and have no spiritual friends in our direct environment, the more we ourselves have to orient ourselves to the Word of God and be eager for it. Our students are scattered throughout the province of Bonn in different

schools. We have to know that today's prevailing spirit of the times is corrupted. Many young people live deceived by the fun and rebellious spirit with a mini-max principle. They want maximum fun and human freedom. At the same time they want to invest only the minimum in learning. In addition, many false doctrines are flourishing in the schools and universities of our country, such as the boundless rebellion against God, for example through genderism or placing man godlike at the centre of all being, godless humanism. Science tries to declare God non-existent, for example by inventing a theory of evolution. Even in religious education the just God is denied by teaching that there is no hell. This zeitgeist leads all students to misfortune. It gives them bad grades at first and then the spiritual rootlessness that makes even their lives fail at a young age. Many students take drugs like computer games or even biological drugs are traded in the schoolyard. They are addicted to people's recognition because they want to find happiness in it. Because they have no roots, they can't stand up for anything, and later on in their studies they quickly change subjects if there is even a small challenge, so that they end up with nothing at all.

I am very thankful to God that our students this summer have devoted their holiday time to both spiritual study trips and the preparation of the historic GLEF 2020 with all their hearts and to descend deeply into the Word of God Nehemiah to know his spirit and leadership. They drink the pure spiritual milk with great pleasure. This is why God sets them up as the strong influential Christians who are needed as spiritual leaders.

Hudson Taylor was a doctor and had to take care of many sick Chinese people all day long. Therefore he was very exhausted. But he found the time in the early morning to look at the Word of God and to have it as a source of strength. This enabled him to lead the strenuous life as a missionary and to found the China Mission. Dr. Samuel Lee also had a great passion for the Word of God. Once he was treated in hospital for pneumonia. However, this did not stop him from preparing the Sunday message with all his heart with his co-workers. His desire to descend deeply into the Word of God and to obey it is the mystery why UBF was able to grow so much through him and today plays an important role in God's world salvation plan through many determined followers.

What have we learned through this passage in summary? God will bless our lust for the pure spiritual milk. We have lust for the Word of God through inductive Bible study, studying the Word of God as the measure of our lives. Through our deep and honest testimonies, we apply it to ourselves again and again and grow for our salvation. We also hold early morning prayer to start the day with God's Word and to have clear orientation. This gives us, as Peter says, the strength to overcome all sin in us, namely all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander.

II. The living stone has become the cornerstone (4-8)

Let us look at verses 4-6: "As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him -- 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. 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.""

Fierce persecution raged around the Christians. Many had lost their homes and all their possessions. When they met, they had to fear that they would be discovered by the state authorities and taken away captive. Then they could perhaps be fed to wild animals or used as living torches. But they should know that not only were they persecuted, but Jesus was persecuted before. Jesus is the living stone who was rejected by the people by being hung on the wooden cross. This living stone is chosen by God and precious. This means that it is precisely because he was rejected so that he became the foundation stone of the community through all times, dying for our sins and being raised from the dead by God on the third day.

It is therefore normal to be persecuted as a Christian. It is normal if you experience many misunderstandings and difficulties in your life. We are allowed to lay the living stones on Jesus and be persecuted like Him and build the spiritual house and the holy priesthood. Peter calls us to make our spiritual sacrifices, that is, to give our hearts to Jesus and live for Jesus.

Anyone who follows Jesus in our time must expect to meet with resistance immediately. People do not want to accept Jesus. They bump

into the stone of Jesus. When some students started to form a prayer circle at their school, they were quickly asked by the director to stop. But they continued to pray, enduring all the persecution and laying on Jesus as living stones. Through them, God builds the spiritual house in which many have become curious and he also makes them spiritually strong. We must know that it is through such prayer groups that God has worked mightily in history. At Oxford University, for example, there was the "Holy Club". Many spiritual leaders were established through this prayer circle, such as John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, or George Whitefield, who is associated with the first great spiritual revival in America and the Evangelical revival in England.

God blesses our students to be undaunted by the current situation, but to know that when they are privileged to be rejected stones, they are building themselves into a spiritual home together with Jesus.

III. The royal priesthood (9-12)

Let us read verse 9: "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." Peter now spoke about the identity of the first Christians. Outwardly, the first Christians did not look special. But in God's eyes they were chosen by God, royal priests, holy people and the people belonging to God. God had given the Israelites a similar verse in Exodus 19:5.6: "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, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'" We see that the identity of the people of God to be chosen as the people of God, was transferred to the Christians with this verse from 1 Peter. It is important with which identity we live in our lives. If we lead our lives without identity, then we drop all hope in inner and outer difficulties and we will eventually become truly hopeless. Our identity therefore shapes our whole being. Let us take a closer look at the identity of Christians:

1. They were the chosen people
God had chosen his people from all nations. They had a special role in that they had been

called by God. That is why God led them out of Egypt into the Promised Land with a strong hand and wanted to use them preciously before all nations.

Everyone would like to be chosen. Many people fight fiercely to be chosen. In Bonn, for example, there will soon be an election, and many large posters are currently being put up to ensure that the faces of politicians are present in the city and that they are elected. If someone has received a special election, then everyone envies him or her. But we must know that God's election is much greater and more precious. In Jesus we are chosen by the eternal God. This election is much more precious than the election as Chancellor or President of the United States, for example. It is more precious than any professorial title or Nobel Prize. It is so because it comes from the living God and gives us the grace to be citizens of the eternal kingdom of God.

God has chosen our next generation by allowing them to be born in a Christian home and to study the Word of God from their youth. God also chose them in that UBF has a great spiritual heritage with vision for 100,000 missionaries by 2041. The first generation is also chosen because God in his grace has placed them in such a church. We have much to thank God for his election.

2. They were the royal priesthood

Furthermore, Christians are called by God as the royal priesthood. Royal means that they are particularly distinguished people. Only a few people are of royal lineage. Royal means that we are leaders, because a king leads his people. May God help the next generation to accept the training of leaders in the world by learning excellently as leaders.

We are still the priesthood. A priest is there to bring the Word of God to the people and the concerns of the people in prayer to God. Jesus has become the eternal high priest, who has opened the way to God through his own sacrifice. Through Jesus we can once again have fellowship with God. We as priests are similar. We help people to have fellowship with God again.

Shepherds and Bible teachers are thus royal priests. We must know that no person grows spiritually without the help of a shepherd, especially in the early days of his life of faith. As roy-

al priests we pray with a broken heart for our sheep with their intentions. We fight for them to be able to receive God's word, not only in theory in their minds, but in practice in their hearts. We fight so that they can lead a spiritual life and gain strength for it. We set them up so that they can also be shepherds themselves. As we learned from the lecture of H. Stefan Elsholz at the GLEF, a royal priest is not only a trainer or coach for a soul, but he is its mentor. The relationship between mentor and mentee is a life-long one. It is a relationship in which the mentor struggles for the mentee to grow in God and become a mentor himself. So the task of a royal priest requires all our heart.

One young man dreamed of climbing the position of a clinic director. He wanted to be big in the world and he put everything he had into it. But as he reflected on his calling as a royal priest, he realized that this world does not need another hospital director, but that people need outstanding Bible teachers and spiritual leaders like Ezra. God gave him the decision to live with the identity of a royal priest rather than an ordinary doctor and he needs him preciously.

Instead of leading their own secure life in Korea, our missionaries were willing to give up everything and learn a foreign culture in a foreign country to be priests for the German students. They were not able to integrate as well as the next generation, but had to fight for having a German community. But unlike other foreigners in Germany, they did not live with the identity as foreigners who want to get everything there is to improve their lives a little bit and then go back home. They served the work of God with their identity as royal priests. With this identity they overcame all obstacles. God gave them the victory as royal priests to pioneer a foreign country and raise up local shepherds in this work. God will do much more through this and write his salvific history of revival through this dedication. If you would like to know more about them, you are cordially invited to our fortieth anniversary service in the last week of September.

Let us put on our new identity as royal priests and live according to it, giving our strength and our heart for spiritual service to our sheep. Let us reflect on this: Am I really committed as a royal priest to the souls entrusted to me, giving my whole heart to bringing their concerns to God and implanting God's Word in their hearts? Or do I rather abandon the souls entrusted to me by not living with the identity of a royal

priest? The priests in the Old Testament offered the sacrifice daily in the morning and in the evening. God has set us up to come to Him also with our intercession for our sheep in the morning and in the evening. Ezra had put all his heart into inductively studying the Word of God and teaching it. He served the people of God by also setting up the Levites to help the people of God with the Word of God. A shepherd should fight with the Word of God within himself to be able to implant one Word of God deep into the heart of his entrusted soul so that he can grow in this Word. I pray that our next generation and our school children will also grow spiritually in being royal priests to and from God for their friends.

God has not only called each one of us as a royal priest, but he has called us as a royal priesthood. Let us come together with our prayer request from the heart to God and fight to form 10,000 one-to-one Bible study teams and reach the nations by sending out 100,000 missionaries by 2041. As a royal priesthood, let us see God's resurrection of our generation from the pioneering of Cambodia, Cartagena and North Korea to three bases in the Muslim world.

3. They were the holy people

To be holy is to be separate. God is holy. To be holy is to be without sin. God is without sin. We are cleansed by the blood of Christ. This means that we are called saints. We have the privilege to be the Holy People.

4. They were the people belonging to God

This is a curious expression. Actually we cannot belong to God even more, because God created the whole earth and therefore the whole earth and we are already His property. But this statement says that we are a special people belonging to God. God protects us like the apple of his eye (Genesis 32:10). We have the privilege of being particularly important people before God, for whom God takes special care.

Many people say that their lives belong only to them and that they can do whatever they want with it. But this is not true. We are God's property. As God's property we are allowed to place ourselves completely at his disposal for his mission.

Sometimes our students ask themselves if we really should live in such an extreme way. For example, some classmates want to have a birthday party on Sunday. When we then say that we want to sanctify Sunday to God by go-

ing to Sunday service, we are looked at strangely. If we do not participate in various sinful activities, we quickly become outsiders. Often there is only one Christian in a school and he becomes an outsider. But we should know that there are two kinds of outsiders. Outsiders who have become outsiders because of their sin and holy outsiders. We are undoubtedly of the second kind. But if we even look at our spiritual identity as royal priests, we realize that we are not the outsiders, but the insiders, because we belong to the living God and all our classmates, although they are the majority, are outsiders before God. This new identity that God has given us changes everything.

I had no identity in my school days. I built my identity on the recognition of the people around me. When some classmates talked badly about me, I felt very miserable. I also began to feel like a curse in this world. But God gave me a new identity from Genesis 12:2 that He wanted to make me a blessing. I started to live with this new identity and I felt a blessing. When I considered myself a blessing, I also became a blessing. Today I am a blessing to those around me, teaching the Word of God to some entrusted souls and interceding for them as a royal priest.

When Dr. Johannes Chang graduated from high school, there was a wave of persecution against the work of God. All his classmates looked at him in a funny way and he was the outsider in the school. But he had the spiritual identity as a royal priest. He overcame his school situation with this identity. Not only did he become the best in his class, but in the end many recognized him and even envied him. For the work of God, he was allowed to learn to network with this identity, so that God blessed the Mustard Seed Orchestra very much and a great work was created from it also at TeenStreet.

Graf von Zinzendorf lived with clear principles even in his school days as a royal priest and God's chosen one. He wanted to be holy. Instead of learning to dance with girls like the others, he rejected it as sinful. Thus he became an outsider. But God blessed him and used him as the founder of the Herrnhut Brethren Church. At that time there was a lot of argument about the different faiths. But God helped him to maintain and build the unity which the Holy Spirit certainly strengthened.

Let us therefore look at our life of faith in the world with our new identity. I pray that our students will be proud of their identity and live with it openly among their fellow students and live for them as royal priests.

What should we do with this new identity now? Verse 9b says: "... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." We are allowed to proclaim the good deeds of God in our lives. We may speak to the unbelievers about how Jesus saved us from the darkness of sin and gave us a glorious new and eternal life. We may speak about the light of Jesus, which has given us a clear orientation for our life. Instead of being passive members of the royal priesthood, we may actively give our lives for it.

Let us read verses 11 and 12: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 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." Finally, Peter once again exhorted the brethren not to follow sin and serve the lusts of the flesh. They should live a righteous life in the midst of the pagan influence. When we do this, the people around us will realize that we belong to God. They will know the power of God that works mightily in our souls. Through our righteous life alone, we exercise the good influence, so that eventually those who have even slandered and persecuted us will turn to God and praise Him on the day he visits us.

Our students who are now attending a new school or have just started school are encouraged by Peter to live a righteous life. They are eager to hear the Word of God by holding on to the Word of God which God has given them and by fighting resolutely with this Word in the new school from the beginning. In this way, God will work mightily in and through them, so that many of their classmates will receive spiritual impetus. Today we have learned to overcome the pagan influence by craving for the pure spiritual milk of the Word of God. Through this milk we will increase for our salvation. We have come to know our cornerstone Jesus, who was rejected before us and on whom we are allowed to lie down and to build the spiritual house. We have also come to know our new identity. We are the royal priesthood in this generation. It is the high calling before God that surpasses all our worldly

vocations. God has chosen us as, instead of living with the small worldly identities, to live as mediators to and from God for the pupils and students. May God bless above all our students to live with this identity in the new school year that is now beginning, to overcome all the zeitgeist and to be royal priests for their fellow students. May God use them as mediators from and to God to the ends of the earth.