

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.”

Let us thank God for the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Bonn UBF. Through the testimonies, the 12-stone reports of the house churches and the lectures on three Sundays and four evenings, it was revealed how God has blessed the faith of his servant and has raised numerous holy seeds and an vast army of God according to his promise. Let us thank God that he has given us vision for the coming years through his word, that through our faith in Jesus, through bible research, discipleship education and the mobilization of the next generation, he is using Germany again as a priestly nation and Europe as a continent sending out missionaries and spreading his word to the ends of the earth.

Today's text is about who Jesus is and who the believers are. Jesus, who gave his life for sinners, is the rejected stone, the living stone and precious cornerstone. The believers follow the example of Jesus through their faith and build themselves up as living stones to the spiritual, holy house. Peter calls them the chosen people, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people belonging to God, who God uses to proclaim His good deeds to the whole world. God may bless us to know Jesus, to follow Him, and to be used as His royal priesthood to declare his praises.

1. Come to him, the living stone (1-8)

Let us read verse 1: “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” Peter begins this passage by inviting the believers

to put away all wickedness, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. These sins burdened them, their relationship with God, and the relationship of believers with one another. How could they discard them? Through faith in God's absolute love. God proved his love for them by the fact that Christ died for them while they were still sinners (Rom 5:8). Trusting in God's love, they could come to him and again hear his word with a pure heart and obey him. Let us read verses 2 and 3: "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." The Lord had proven himself to be kind to them. He had forgiven their sin and accepted them as his children. He had also prepared for them the best food for growth. Babies grow through breast milk. Mother's milk is full of healthy nutrients and optimal for the growth of the children. God's children grow through the Word of God. The Word of God is the sensible, pure milk through which they grow for their salvation. What does it mean here: "grow up in your salvation"? It means that believers grow in obedience to the Word of God throughout their lives. God's Word not only satisfies our hunger once, but also changes our thinking and our actions. Growing up in your salvation means greedily sucking in the Word of God and growing in obedience until we attain salvation. Psalm 34:9.10 say, "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing." A life with the Lord is a life of repentance and a life of obedience

to the Word of God. We may come to Him again and again with our sins, experience forgiveness and cleansing, and grow through the Word of God in our salvation.

Let us read verses 4 and 5: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans 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." At that time the faithful were severely oppressed. When they believed in Jesus, they separated themselves from the world. The result was that they were mocked at first. When they held on to their faith with joy, they experienced all the more hatred and slander. Finally, some of them were thrown into prison and threatened with death if they did not renounce their faith. But they did not and died as martyrs for their faith in Jesus. Apostle Peter was deeply moved by their faith and wanted to encourage everyone else as well. He invited them to come to Jesus. Jesus is the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen and precious by God. Jesus became the living stone by giving his life for the sheep as the good shepherd. He prayed in Gethsemane and took the rejection upon Himself by choosing to take upon Himself the sin of mankind and carry it in His own body on the cross. Sinners did not understand his love and despised, reviled, beat and crucified Jesus. He did not despise when he was reviled. Then he was thrown away like a shabby useless stone. But the rejected stone was the living stone. His life of service and dedication was full of the life of God. When he died, he defeated death and sin. Jesus, the living stone, became the chosen, precious cornerstone of the Kingdom of God.

The believers are called to come to him, that is, to follow his example. Verse 5 says: "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". Peter does not comfort the believers with human words. He invites them to come to Jesus and follow

him. The Christians who have received the new life by grace and follow Jesus by faith are living stones. Through their life of following Jesus, they build a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices that are pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.

There are countless examples of living stones. Martin Luther became a living stone when he received righteousness from faith and began to follow Jesus (Rom 1:17). He had a burning shepherd's heart for proclaiming the truth of the gospel and for training disciples. His faith in Jesus made him a living, rejected stone. He was accused and expelled from the church. But he followed unwaveringly his Lord Jesus, who became the cornerstone, so that through him and his followers many became disciples. Missionary Dr. Peter Chang received through Jesus a burning shepherd heart for the campus mission in Europe. His faith brought much fruit in Bible research, fellowship and discipleship among the students and leaders of the next generation, as we were able to see at the Global Leadership Empowerment Forum. This provoked the envy of Satan, and he was rejected. But he confessed, like Apostle Paul in Phil 1:21, "To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." His faith made him a living, rejected stone, through which many were encouraged in the determined following of Jesus. One young man was seeking a petty life in peace and recognition of the people. But in his student days he met Jesus, the rejected stone, the cornerstone, who had given his life for his sin. As he followed Jesus by faith, he experienced unexpected tribulations. But he held on to his faith in Jesus and his calling as a full-time shepherd for the campus mission. His faith made him a living stone, encouraging many and challenging many to repent for their willingness to compromise and follow Jesus without ifs and buts. Our faith in Jesus makes us living stones. Discipleship also includes being rejected. We are rejected because we follow Jesus, the rejected stone, the living stone and cornerstone. We are blessed to come to Him as living stones and build ourselves into the spiritual house.

Let us look at verses 6-8: "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. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and, A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for." Peter says here, quoting from Isaiah and the Psalms, that all Scripture bears witness to Jesus as the cornerstone. In recent years, through studying the five books of Moses and the books of the prophets, we have been able to recognize that Jesus is the Almighty Creator and the holy God who fulfills His sovereign will through the holy stump. Faith according to the Scriptures does not let us be put to shame. But the unbelievers stumble at the cornerstone Jesus because they do not believe in the Word. Not believing in the Word is a very serious matter, because it entails the judgment of God. Jesus says in John 12:48: "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." Faith must necessarily be based on the Word of God. If we base our faith on the Word of God through Bible study, Jesus, the cornerstone, will become more and more precious to us than our Savior, Redeemer, good shepherd and eternal King.

2 The royal priesthood (9-12)

Let us look at 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." In the previous passage, Peter had testified that Jesus is the living stone, the precious, chosen cornerstone, and that believers are called to follow his example by faith in Jesus. Now he refers to the believers as the chosen people, the royal priesthood, the ho-

ly people, the people belonging to God, who are called to proclaim the benefits of God.

First, the chosen people. From a human point of view, they had nothing that set them apart from others. But God had chosen them. Amos 3:2 says, "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth." Recently a new mayor was elected in Bonn. But this has no great significance compared to the election of God. Whoever is chosen by God is used and blessed by God, no matter what adverse circumstances he finds himself in. The man born blind in John 9 received Jesus' grace. Jesus made a mud, spread it on his eyes, had him wash and made him see. God's grace turned this man from a beggar into a king. Immediately he was interrogated, reviled and rejected by the elders. But he held fast to the grace of God, because he was God's chosen people, and proclaimed the benefits of God, who had called him from darkness to his wonderful light. The first Christians also experienced many afflictions, often from their relatives or superiors, but they did not despair. They were God's chosen people. As the chosen generation, they served the Lord Jesus with joy, even in the midst of suffering. There is no greater grace than the special grace of being God's chosen people.

Second, the royal priesthood. Royal means here, in the wake of the King Jesus. Priesthood describes the election and identity of all believers. All believers belong to the royal priesthood. The priests have the office to pray for the people and to teach the Word of God. According to Exodus 30:7,8, they were allowed to bring the incense offering of prayer for the people to God every morning and evening. And according to Genesis 10:10,11, they were allowed to teach the people of God all the orders of God. Why did they do it? Because they were the priests ordained by God. As long as the anointing oil was on them, they did not leave the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:7). Their identity as royal priesthood determined their whole life and separated them from the unholy world.

It is the same with our identity as royal priesthood. We are the royal priesthood. As the royal priesthood, we have the priestly task as mediators to pray for the hopeless people and teach them God's Word. As a royal priesthood, we have the purpose in life to fulfill Jesus' world mission command (Matthew 28:19-20): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Our whole life is at the disposal of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

An example of the royal priesthood is Ezra. Ezra grew up as a next generation Israelite in the best of Persian circumstances and could have adapted to the environment and enjoyed the Persian high culture like many others. But he had the identity as God's chosen race and royal priesthood. His identity as a royal priesthood led him to make a life decision. He set his heart to researching the law of the Lord and to doing it and teaching commandments and statutes in Israel. With this life decision he went to Jerusalem and dedicated his whole life to Bible study and discipleship among the Levites. In addition, he researched and recorded the history of the people of God in the books of the chronicles. Through him and through the Bible teachers who learned from him, God brought about the spiritual renewal and restoration of Israel.

"The royal priesthood" is the identity of those who believe in Jesus. A young woman heard the testimonies of Bonn UBF and compared them with those of her church where she had grown up. She wondered how many coworkers there are in our ministry. This is because our shepherd has helped each of us for years to accept how God looks at us: "You are the royal priesthood." We are not hirelings, but the royal priesthood.

Here I could accept that the life of the believers is a life with the identity of the royal priesthood. Outwardly, I seemed to cooperate in the work of God, but I was still leading

my own life out of my own righteousness. Thus, what I was doing also revealed not Jesus, but my own godless being. But here I could realize that Jesus first gave me a new life, namely the new identity as the royal priesthood. I repent for my life for my sinful ego and take the identity as the royal priesthood. As a royal priesthood, Jesus is honored in everything I do. As a royal priesthood, I may, like Ezra, dedicate myself to Bible study and discipleship with clear life choices and know that God is honored and will bear fruit in due time.

At the anniversary service we heard the testimonies of those who are ready to serve world mission, be it in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Cambodia, North Korea. They are the royal priesthood, who do not spare their lives, but are ready to lay down their lives for the will of Jesus. Jim Elliot and his friends were the royal priesthood who gave their lives for the mission among the native people in Ecuador. The royal priesthood is the community of those who live for Jesus and obey his world mission command, thereby making disciples of all nations.

In Bonn UBF in the past years, we experienced God's cleansing grace. This allowed the leaders of the next generation in particular to strengthen their identity as royal priesthood. According to God's sovereign counsel, we are called to be a spiritual headquarters for world campus missions. The Gideon and Ezekiel team members are now called to spiritually renew their generation and the next through inductive Bible study like Ezra. God works, as he has promised, through the holy seed and through the dry bones, that rose and stood on their feet as a vast army, and thereby proclaim God's praises in the whole world.

Third, the holy nation. God's people are the holy people. We are incorrigible sinners. Yet we are sanctified by the blood of Jesus. Ephesians 5:25-26 say that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it to sanctify it. Through Jesus we have become holy and thus separated from the ungodly world. As holy people, we have the privilege of prac-

ticing worship by giving our bodies as a sacrifice that is alive, holy, and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1). In the world, individualism and egoism are considered “normal”. Therefore, those who intercede, have fellowship and help one another to live as disciples of Jesus are viewed as insane. Yet we are God's holy people, set apart to live holy lives and do God's will.

Fourth, the people belonging to God. We are God's property and His most precious possession on this earth. He regards us as precious as the apple of his eye or like a father his child. As God's property, we have the privilege of his upbringing. Hebrews 12: 7 says, “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?” As God's property, we also experience his protection. In Nahum 1: 7 it says: “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.” And as a people of property we experience true consolation (Ps 34:18.19): “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.” God protects, educates and comforts us and gives us many more privileges because we are his people of property.

Let us read again 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.” God has chosen and privileged us with a specific purpose, that is, that his benefits may be proclaimed. God's benefits are proclaimed through all believers. God led his people Israel out of slavery in Egypt to Mount Sinai. Forty days before, they had been slaves thinking only of eating and sleeping. But God said to them (Exodus 19: 6): “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Nobody is too young to proclaim God's praises. Children and newcomers to the faith can also proclaim God's praises, who called them from darkness to his wonderful light. At the Jubilee, seven

house churches proclaimed God's praises through their testimonies over twelve stones each. The global leaders from the Josiah team learned faith through early morning prayer, Bible study, and fellowship, and they proclaim God's praises through their testimonies of faith. God's praises are already being proclaimed at all faculties of Bonn University, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University, Koblenz University, at all 1,700 universities in Europe, in Istanbul, Cairo and Dubai.

Look at verses 11 and 12: “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage 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.” Peter knew that the life of a believer was not easy. They have been slandered as evildoers in the pagan environment. But with God they were His chosen people, his royal priesthood, the holy nation, and the people belonging to God. They should abstain from sinful desires that wage against the soul and live righteously among the Gentiles. A righteous life among the Gentiles is a powerful testimony. Even then, some of those who now slander us as evildoers will see our good works and praise God on the day of the visitation.

Today we learn who Jesus is and who we are. Jesus, who gave his life on the cross for sinners, is the rejected stone, the living stone, and the precious cornerstone. We as living stones are called to follow his example by believing in him. We also learn that by God's sovereign grace we are the elect, the royal priesthood, the holy people, and the people belonging to God. Let us come to Jesus and, by believing in him, serve influentially the ministry of Bible study and discipleship as the royal priesthood for the next forty years.