

## **The Israel of God**

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**Community: The Beloved Community Series**

**1 Peter 2:8-10**

There was at one and the same time a heart-wrenching and heart-warming story that recently appeared in the newspaper. It was about a woman named Christine Anderson and her discovery of two of her four long-lost brothers who were deserted in the 1950's by their drunken parents. The story of Christine's childhood is something that you would expect to find in a Charles Dickens novel. It was unbelievably tragic.

Her parents, who are now dead, were frequently drunk and left their four children to fend for themselves. They spent most of their money on alcohol. At the age of 7 Christine became a little mom to the younger boys. They were often locked in the basement, beaten, forbidden to go to school. Her brother, David, who was very close to her, was forced out onto the streets to beg in order to get money for food. Very often they had to eat baby food to stay alive.

Christine's mom came home one day and said that she wouldn't be coming back. And so they should walk to their grandparents' house, which was twelve miles away. The five children walked to grandma and grandpa's house. But the grandparents couldn't handle five little children.

Christine used to hide with her four younger brothers from what she called the "cruelty men." One day the police came and took the five children away. The authorities split the kids up; Christine was passed from orphanages to foster homes. She never saw her brothers again until she married, her new husband, when she was 60 years old. He worked in IT and said, "I thought it was incredibly sad that Christine always said, 'I have no family.' And so I committed to her on our wedding day that I would track her brothers down for her."

He said that recently after an extensive search, he found Christine's brother, David. David and Christine spoke on the phone for the first time in 40 years. They've been in touch ever since. Christine has also found a second brother named Ernest. David said, "Finding Christine is better than winning the lottery. She is like an angel. My mother used to abuse us all and Christine had a terrible life. But now I feel that things are coming right for us. I had given up on ever being able to find her."

Christine's husband said, "I'm now on the trail of John and James. My reward will be to see my wife together with her four brothers and allow them to spend at least one day together before they die."

The search for one's family, one's parents and siblings, was really spurred in this country by the author Alex Haley and his popular novel, *Roots*, which spawned an even more popular TV mini-series back in 1977 called "Roots." In fact, the final episode of *Roots* scored the third most watched telecast of all time in America. The audience just built and built for this *Roots* mini-series. Interest crossed racial lines. How many of you have seen the *Roots* mini-series?

Some of you may know that there is some controversy about the historical accuracy of Alex Haley's reconstruction of his family history. But whether historically accurate or not, there was profound truth in the passion of Alex Haley to reconnect with his African roots. There was this powerful scene where Haley makes a personal visit to the Griot, the oral historian in his ancestor's African village in Gambia. And as this Griot tells the story of the members of his tribe generation after generation, Haley, who is sweating from the heat of the African sun, suddenly hears the Griot utter the name of his African ancestor, a name that had been passed down generation to generation in the Haley family, the name Kunta Kinte, who was captured by slave traders back in 1767.

There is something essential to our self-understanding in being able to discover our roots, our family, where we came from, who are our parents, who are our brothers and sisters.

Last week I started a series on the church that I've called *The Beloved Community*. That phrase is borrowed from the frequent reference to the beloved community that we find in Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermons. He often preached that what he longed for in the whole Civil Rights Movement was the creation of the beloved community, a community in which all the alienations, all the divisions between people, would be broken down.

And as I continue to do this series on the church, which is meant to be the beloved community, I want to talk today about the church's roots, our parentage, our family, and indeed, our identity. I've called today's talk, "The Israel of God." Let's pray.

I want to begin by offering three basic reasons for choosing to connect with our small group ministry. Why, if you are super-busy, why with all your other commitments – work, kids, school, family obligations, why take an evening, or arrange a few times a month to join a small group?

As we press into this discussion of the beloved community, we could say first of all that only in community do we discover who we are.

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Only in community do we discover who we are.

Last week, I talked about how disconnected we Americans have become from each other. The average American has very few relationships in which we can be utterly transparent. We have very few relationships where we can completely trust the other person to stand by us and support us in good and bad times. And it is this disconnectedness, this isolation from meaningful relationship with other people that has led so many people into a crisis of identity, especially among young people. The issue of “who am I” is an almost unanswerable issue today.

Young people, who are raised in divorced families, in single parent families, in disconnected families with temporary and very fragile relationships, are constantly asking the question: Who am I? Who am I really? I’m looking for a job and I’m told that I need to do something that is consistent with my passions, but I just don’t know what my passions are. I don’t know what would be satisfying or fulfilling, or where I should make a commitment in terms of work.

I would love to have a long-term relationship with someone, but I just don’t know if I could ever really be satisfied with just one person. How do I know that I won’t become bored, or feel trapped, or controlled by this other human being?

In terms of work, in terms of love, in terms of where you end up living, how do you ultimately find out who you are so that you can begin to make commitments and not just live as an adolescent, even though you are in your mid-20’s or maybe mid-30’s?

I will tell you how you don’t discover who you are. You don’t discover who you are by sitting in a room alone and looking inside yourself. The great myth of American individualism is that you and I could discover our identities by ourselves. Neither do we discover who we are by taking a bunch of tests – Myers Briggs, DISC – they offer some limited help, but you and I can’t be reduced to a few letters, or a square on some grid.

There was a hugely important book written a couple of decades ago. It was one of the most important studies of American society written in the last 40 years. The book was by Robert Bellah and some other sociologists. The book’s title was “Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.” Here is what Robert Bellah said:

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*There are truths we do not see when we adopt the language of radical individualism. We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions, but through them. We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. All of our self-discovery takes place in relationships, in*

*groups, in associations, and communities. We learn to interpret ourselves by becoming connected to something greater than ourselves.*

Friend, if you are looking for true self-discovery, where should I land in terms of career choice, what is my calling, should I consider paid ministry, is this person the one I should commit to, is this the one, or should I keep looking – should I consider divorce. The only way to answer the really big questions in your life is through deep connections in Christian community. One major reason to join a men's group or a women's group, a small group, is because only through a web of deep relationships to you find yourself. Here's who I am. Here is what God is saying.

There is a wonderful example of this way back in Genesis 24. The servant of Abraham has been sent on a mission to secure for Abraham a wife for his son, Isaac. So Abraham's servant travels to the town where Abraham's relatives live. He meets this gorgeous young woman who gives him some water from a stream, and who also offers water to his camels. She is obviously a very gracious and serving young woman. In Genesis 24.23, the servant asks.

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Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"

And notice Rebekah's answer in v. 24,

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She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milkah bore to Nahor."

She does not say, "I am Rebekah. Here is who I am as an individual." She doesn't say, "Let me tell you about my talents. Here is how I've established my identity on my own." She points to her family connections. This is the way that people have historically understood themselves, by their community. This is the way we discover ourselves, through deep relationships, through connection.

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Only in community do we become happy.

The myth of individualism says that the way you become happy is by having all of your needs met. I used the illustration last week of an ice cube tray. We perceive ourselves as being like an empty ice cube tray and the way we become happy is by having each of the various slots in the tray filled. We perceive ourselves as the result of modern pop psychology and especially Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs that you learned in Psychology 101 – we view ourselves as a collection of needs. We have a need for love. We have a need to be affirmed. We have a need to be respected. We have a need to express ourselves. We have a need

to be heard. And happy people are people who have every one of these ice cube tray needs filled. We say in marriage, "I am not happy because you are not meeting my need to be listened to without interruption," or "because you don't meet my need for sex." I'm not happy at my job because it doesn't meet my need for variety or challenge.

65 years ago Walter Lippmann, the journalist and social critic said,

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*People don't become happy by satisfying their needs or desires. They become happy by living within a belief system that restrains and gives coherence to their desires. Above all the other necessities of human nature, above the satisfaction of any need, above hunger, love, pleasure, fame – even life itself – what a man needs most is the conviction that he is contained within the disciplined ordered existence.*

In other words, what people need most of all to be happy is the sense that they are living in conformity to the beliefs of the community that they are a part of. What makes us happy is not satisfying all of our desires. Poor people who have deep relationships with family and friends can be very happy. Wealthy people who have few relationships can be very unhappy. What makes us happy is the sense that we are living consistently with the values of the community that we most esteem.

Let me give you an illustration. The New York Times recently printed an article about diplomats to the United Nations wracking up unpaid parking tickets. Someone did a study of who was wracking up the most unpaid parking tickets. What they discovered were diplomats from countries that ranked highest on the international corruption index wracked up the most parking tickets. For example, the UN Mission of Kuwait picked up 246 parking violations per diplomat. Diplomats from Egypt, Chad, the Sudan, Mozambique, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Syria also committed huge numbers of violations. Meanwhile, not a single parking violation was recorded by a Swedish diplomat, nor were there any violations from diplomats from Denmark, Japan, Israel, Norway, or Canada.

Now, there is no explaining the huge variation between one country wracking up 246 violations per diplomat and another country wracking up none, at least in terms of economics, because the diplomats pay no cost for parking illegally thanks to diplomatic immunity. But you see, we human beings are shaped by our community, not just by economics. And if you are Swedish and you have a chance to pull up in front of a fire hydrant and park your car there, you don't do it. Why not? Because you are Swedish. Because what makes you happy is living in conformity to your Swedish culture, which has huge respect for other people and for the laws of other places.

In order to be happy, you've got to find yourself living in conformity to a community's values, beliefs, and morals. This is what makes finding the right community so important. And this is what makes discovering the wrong community so horrible. Kids who don't have alternatives find themselves drifting into gangs for a sense of community and belonging. Pretty soon their behavior and their sense of right and wrong floats with the gang that they are hanging out with. This is also why parents need to constantly monitor who their kids are hanging around with, who their friends are, what college they go to, who our kids are finding deepest relationship with.

What makes a human being happy is living in conformity to their chosen community.

And listen, the internet has a powerful impact on the shaping of individuals' behavior and their sense of right and wrong. I have a friend who got his Ph.D. in sexual education and in particular in aberrant sexual practices. My friend is very popular at dinner parties.

Any way, after getting his doctorate in aberrant sexual behaviors, he became a Vineyard pastor. I talked with him not too long ago and he said, "You know, Rich, the internet is one of the major ways that people are getting more and more aberrant in their sexual behaviors. You see, 20 years ago, if a man was living in a small town and had dark desires, it would have been very difficult to act on those desires because he got no community support. And so that man would fight against the expression of dark and twisted desires. But now, the internet allows a person sitting in a small town to connect with a thousand other people around the world, who share the same twist, so that that man now has a community to legitimate his desires."

My friend said, "I expect to see a further explosion in the next 20 years of aberrant behaviors as more and more communities of folks get formed normalizing and legitimating perverted behavior."

One of the most deeply troubling developments in the last few months took place in the Netherlands as a group of male pedophiles formed a pedophile political party. And their right to form such a party was upheld by the Dutch Supreme Court.

Only in community do we discover who we are. Only in community do we become happy. And,

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Only in community do we discover our status and calling.

What was God's plan in making us anyway? Why do we exist and what is our purpose in life? Is our purpose just to make more money to fill our house with

more things? Is our purpose described by the bumper sticker which says, “I think; therefore, I shop.”

You know, the early church in general, and the New Testament writers, in particular, faced a number of challenges as they thought about what the coming of Jesus into the world meant. One of the big questions that they faced was how should they deal with the fact that God’s chosen people, the Jews, largely rejected Jesus as Messiah. Did God simply turn away from the Jewish people and say, “You’ve forsaken me, so I will forsake you forever?”

And what was the largely Gentile church to do with the whole Old Testament story? Was the story about Israel and the Jews relevant for a largely Gentile church? Or should the church simply understand itself as being created out of nothing through the coming of Jesus and forget all about the Old Testament and the story of Israel?

These are very complicated questions which have been wrestled over by theologians in the church for the last 2000 years. Let me try to tackle the issues of God’s treatment of Israel and the church’s understanding of its relationship to Israel in as simple a way as I can. But if you are interested in this subject of the church and Israel, and particularly, if you are interested in the subject of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians over the Promised Land, I would encourage you to pick up a book that I have found to be the most even-handed, fair treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is titled *Whose Promised Land: The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine* by Colin Chapman. We have some copies available in our bookstore. If you like history, if you like current events, if you are a student of the Bible, you will love this book - *Whose Promised Land: The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine*. Colin Chapman is a lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. He is a Christian and he really helps a person sort through this issue, in what I have found to be an incredibly fair, even-handed treatment.

Let me lay out four basic principles here. Principle #1 is this:

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The church does not replace Israel.

Against what has been called “replacement theology,” the technical phrase is supercessionism, the apostle Paul argues in Romans 9-11 that God will still be faithful to his promises despite that the bulk of Jewish people rejected Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. God is still faithful despite people’s unfaithfulness.

But in the subtlety of the apostle Paul’s argument, he points out that the Israel of God has never completely overlapped with the physical descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, there is a difference between physical descent and spiritual descent. Romans 9.6-9,

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Ro 9:6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. <sup>7</sup> Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." <sup>8</sup> In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. <sup>9</sup> For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

John the Baptist argued the same thing. Physical descent is not all-important with God. What the Lord looks for is trust in himself, devotion to Christ, and a commitment to follow.

The apostle Paul further argues that the gospel comes to the Gentile through the nation of Israel, so that those of us who are Gentiles always owe a debt of gratitude to the original Jewish believers in Jesus. The apostle Paul argues against any Gentile-Christian superiority over Jews: Well, you know, we believe in Jesus and they don't. We're somehow superior to them. Paul uses the analogy of an olive tree in Romans 11.17-21 saying this:

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Ro 11:17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, <sup>18</sup> do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. <sup>19</sup> You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." <sup>20</sup> Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

But God has not forsaken physical Israel forever. But God will be faithful to his promises made to Abraham. We read in 11.25-27 these words:

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Ro 11:25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not think you are superior: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, <sup>26</sup> and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. <sup>27</sup> And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

My understanding of these words is very simple. Before Messiah returns, there is going to be a mass conversion of a large part of the Jewish people to faith in Jesus as Messiah. This has nothing to do with the current political issue between Jews and Palestinians of how to do justice to both despite Arab claims and legitimate Jewish claims. If you're interested in my views on this, read my congregational email, "Can There Be Peace In The Middle East." And one of the ways we know that the clock is ticking down and the larger return may be near is as we see more and more Jewish people embrace Jesus as our Messiah.

But here is the second thing. Although the church does not replace Israel,

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The church is the heir of the promises given to Israel.

Like Alex Haley in the story of *Roots*, like Christine, who was searching for her brothers, the church needs to rediscover its heritage. The church has been grafted into the olive tree. So Gentile Christian, the Old Testament story of Israel becomes your story. As you look back in your family lineage, you just don't look back to some Englishman swinging through the trees in England; don't just look back to Ireland or Germany or India or Africa; as you look back on your lineage, you, Christian, must look back to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You are children of Abraham. The entire Old Testament story, Gentile Christian, it is your story.

The New Testament and the New Testament church was not built on nothing. It springs from the Old Testament like a butterfly from a caterpillar. All of the whole Old Testament promises are fulfilled in the church with the one caveat that I just mentioned – The Lord will, before he returns, save a large number of Jewish people.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations here. In the gospel of Mark, when we read the gospel we find at the beginning that John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus, was preaching out in the desert. And so we read in Mark 1.4-5 these words:

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Mk 1:4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Now why is it that John the Baptist is out in the desert and people had to go out to meet him in the desert? Well, you can't understand your New Testament unless you know and understand the whole story of the Jews in the Old Testament. God comes to Israel and calls his people in the desert. He frees the

Jewish people from their sins and all their idolatry, all the baggage of conformity to this world, he frees people in the desert. And so we read in Hosea 2:14,

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“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her

In the desert we get rid of all of our false lovers and our idols. (And, by the way, God may take you into a desert experience – a really hard time to get your freed up from all of your idols and all of your addictions.) But you won’t understand the ministry of John the Baptist unless you understand him against the whole Exodus tradition of the Old Testament.

Why does Jesus call the Twelve? It says in Mark 3:14-16,

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Mk 3:14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and to have authority to drive out demons. <sup>16</sup> These are the twelve he appointed

Why Twelve? Why not eleven? Why not thirteen? People who are familiar with the Old Testament immediately see that the twelve disciples could only refer to back to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus is restoring Israel. Israel, who had been unfaithful; Israel, who had been scattered to the winds; Israel, who had been taken into captivity with only a couple of tribes returning. The Jewish Messiah is recreating Israel by appointing the twelve new patriarchs who are to go on preaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick, casting out demons.

Over and over again as you read the gospels, they are the fulfillment of what the Old Testament pointed to. There is Jesus out in the wilderness giving bread to the people, just as Moses gave bread in the wilderness. The Israelite wilderness wanderings are our wanderings. The Israelites crossing of the Red Sea into the promised land points to our baptism and their fight to take possession of the land points to the church’s spiritual warfare as the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. The church is heir to the promises given to Israel.

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The church is heir of the names given to Israel.

Who are you? What’s your identity? What’s your name? Those who are adopted sometimes go on a search to find out what their birth parents names were. What’s my name? And you adopted child of God, you are to search the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, to discover your name and your roots.

Virtually every name given to the people of Israel in the Old Testament is used of the church in the New Testament. So, for example, in the Old Testament Israel is called, The Bride of Yahweh, in Jeremiah 2.2,

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“Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “This is what the LORD says:

“ ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown.

And in the New Testament we read that we Christians are the Bride of Christ, Rev. 21.2,

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I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Rev. 21.9,

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One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

We are also Abraham’s offspring.

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Ro 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

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Ro 3:29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,

Why do you think Jesus uses the image of a vineyard when he says in John 15.1-2 these words:

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Jn 15:1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes <sup>1</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful.

Why didn't he use an image of an apple tree, or an orange grove, or a palm tree? Why a vineyard? Because in the Old Testament, Israel is specifically called a vineyard. So we read in Isaiah 5.1 and 7 these words:

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Isa 5:1 I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

Isa 5:7 The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

And whether we are talking about the Temple of God, or the term Jerusalem, or the Flock of God, or the Israel of God – all the names given to Israel in the Old Testament are used of the church in the New Testament. This is who you are.

I want to close by having us look at one particular text which celebrates this incredible connection between the church today and the Israel of yesterday. 1 Peter 2.9-10,

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1Pe 2:8 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. <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, 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.

I want you to particularly note that the church is heir to the names given to Israel. Peter is speaking to a largely Gentile church audience yet he uses the names that the Lord applied to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Exodus 19.5-6

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<sup>5</sup> "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, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

Let's just focus on a few of these names for a moment. Notice, by the way, that none of these names are individual names. Peter is not addressing us as individuals and saying, "Look at the status God has given you as an individual." Peter is saying, "Look at the change of status you enjoy as a result of being part of this community the church." In other words, Peter is not saying, "Imagine what you would feel like if as a golfer you won the Masters' Tournament. Imagine the status you would have as you slipped on that Green Jacket at Augusta." He is not saying, "Mom, imagine the pleasure you would have watching your son or daughter being sworn in as a US Senator or as the Secretary of State." He is not saying, "Dad, imagine the feeling of pride you would have if your son won the Heisman Trophy and during his acceptance speech, he said, 'I want to dedicate this to you, dad, because you made me what I am.'"

No, these are not individual honors. Peter is saying along with the rest of the Bible, only in community do we discover who we are. Only in community do we become happy. Only in community do we find our status. This is a group thing. Our change in status, our new name comes about by becoming deeply connected with the church. It is like the feeling a person gets by being on a Super Bowl championship team. A man looks down on his Super Bowl ring and he doesn't say, "I did it." He says, "We did it."

Who are we? We the church are the chosen people of God right now.

Now, this whole matter of chosenness is so often approached by students of the Bible in a spirit of argument. What do you mean you are chosen? Let's argue about the particular way we understand being chosen. The Bible never presents our chosenness as a matter of argument. Our chosenness is presented as a matter of fact. The Bible simply states it as a fact that if you are connected to the church through your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, you are part of the chosen people. You are the elect of God.

You say, "How do I wrap my mind around being chosen by God?"

I'll tell you, friend, if you are a Christian you wrap your mind around that all the time when you are on your knees in prayer. I've never met a Christian who knelt down before God and said, "Thank you, God, that I was smart enough to choose you out of all the various options. I was clever enough to know that Jesus, you were the true one. I thank you, God that I was so wise that even though other people dismiss you, I didn't because I have a nose for the truth."

When you get down on your knees for prayer, you say one thing. You say, "Thank you, God, for saving me. I had nothing to do with it. It is all grace. It is all your sovereign choice."

You say, 'I don't understand this business of being chosen by God.' I tell you, you do understand it when you get down on your knees. Because when you are on your knees, you always attribute the entirety of your salvation to God alone.

You say, "How do I understand this?" The teaching is not that you are choice. The teaching is not that you are prime beef. It is that you are chosen.

You say, "Well, why would God choose me?"

The Bible plunges that question into the love of God. We read in Deuteronomy 7:7-8 these words:

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<sup>Dt 7:7</sup> The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.  
<sup>8</sup> But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

It is not because of who we are, but in spite of who we are that God chooses us. We are a chosen people.

When you place your faith in Jesus, and you are plunged into connection with the church, you become part of a royal priesthood. The church is a priesthood especially attached to the King, King Jesus. The job of the priest is to be a go-between, to represent God to people and to represent people to God. And that is the function of the church in this world, to be a go-between, to be an electrical relay.

The way the world knows what God is like is that it looks at the church. Is God kind? We don't know; let's look at his people. Is God welcoming? We don't know; let's look at his people. Does God care about people who are marginalized? We don't know; let's look at his people. Does God care about pressures on the successful? We don't know; let's look at his people.

And as part of the church, we bring the world to God. We pray for this world. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, Lord – at my job, in my family, at OSU, in my classroom, may your kingdom come, may your will be done. You and I can't hold the whole world up to God in prayer no matter how much we individually pray, but the whole church can. All across this city the church can hold up our particular part of the world before God. And across the world wherever the church finds itself together we can act as a priest. As you get deeply connected to the church, you begin to fulfill this incredible calling to be a royal priest.

And we are a holy nation. Holy just doesn't mean morally perfect. It means that, but holy in the Bible means separated from the world and separated to God. And you see, being part of a holy nation means that the church is to be different than the world. Our primary identity is not that we are Asians, or Mexicans, or Americans. Our primary identity is that we are Christians and citizens of the heavenly kingdom. And we are to be different than the world around us. Not different weird, but different good. When the church engages the community, people ought to say, "I see a difference in the way that you relate and I like this difference. It is good."

God wants people to look at Vineyard Columbus and say, "You folks are different – different good. You don't just take from people. Your church gives. You don't come to our city or our school system as if you are at war with us. You come to serve. You come to support. I love the difference in the way you explain Christianity and Jesus to us."

And finally,

SLIDE

The church is heir to the calling of Israel.

1 Peter 2.9,

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<sup>1Pe 2:9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Israel never fulfilled its call to be a witness to the nations. Israel took the light of God and erected mirrors around the light reflecting the light back on itself. But God has chosen the heirs of Israel's promise – the church - so that the rest of the world might know the good news about Jesus, the rest of the world might experience the love of Jesus, and the rest of the world might be changed by the power of Jesus. You can't fulfill the calling upon Israel by yourself. You can't be the light of the world by yourself. You need to be deeply connected to God's people. Only God's people together can be the light of the world.

Here is our vision statement at Vineyard Columbus:

SLIDE

Our vision is to be a relevant church that exists not for itself, but for Christ and for the world.

Israel took the blessing of God and turned that blessing in on itself. As such, Israel betrayed its calling to be a worshipper of God and a witness to the world. And that is our calling also, friends. As a church we don't believe that we are to

exist just for ourselves. The purpose of getting deeply knit into community here is not just that your needs be met. The purpose of you engaging in community is for Christ and for the world.

You believing friend are the Israel of God. You are heirs to the promises of Israel. You are heirs to the names given to Israel. You are heirs of the calling given to Israel. Connect with God's people so that you can be who you are. Let's pray.

## **The Israel of God**

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**Rich Nathan**

**September 23-24, 2006**

**Community: The Beloved Community Series**

**1 Peter 2.8-10**

### **I. The Value Of Community**

- A. Only In Community Do We Discover Who We Are.
- B. Only In Community Do We Become Happy.
- C. Only In Community Do We Discover Our Status And Calling.

### **II. The Meaning Of The Church**

- A. The Church Is The Heir Of The Promises Given To Israel.
- B. The Church Is The Heir Of The Titles Given To Israel.
  - 1. Metaphors For Israel
  - 2. Titles For The Church (1 Peter 2.9)
    - a. Chosen Race
    - b. Royal Priesthood
    - c. Holy Nation
- C. The Church Is The Heir Of The Calling Given To Israel. (1 Peter 2.9,10)