

Chosen for Worship

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Date: 06 September 2019

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[0 : 00] It's great to be with you all. As Peter said, my name is James. I come from Edinburgh originally, which is the accent that you're hearing. If there are any difficulties at any point with understanding my accent, understanding anything that I'm saying, do come and speak to me.

I will be insulted, but I will do my best to try and help you. Let me also just add to what Peter said about the question and answer session. I just know from my own experience at conferences that very often that can be one of the most useful times where it's actually just an opportunity not for us as speakers to sit up here and to give you all the answers, but really just to work together to try and understand some of these big issues because we're going to be thinking about some complicated stuff. It is a chance to bury more into the detail, so please, please do be thinking about those questions. There's almost a sense in which you say, well, no questions off limits.

It doesn't mean that we'll give you an answer. We might just be like, no, no, type that into Google. But we will do... I'm kidding. Ask your pastor, of course, but we will do our best.

Just to give you a roadmap of where we're going on this conference, I did pick up, and I put it in my back pocket, just the program, which you've already seen, but just to unpack a little bit more around how we're trying to do this, myself and Luke and then Keith at the end. So this big theme that we're looking at, outnumbered but happy, living for Christ when the world is against you, what we're going to do is essentially both of my talks will be more exposition, so actually going into a passage and then more of a kind of traditional preach, and then Luke will be doing all the heresy. I'm kidding.

He will be doing more thematic stuff, so actually looking at some of the issues, the contemporary issues that we're facing. See, I can see he's looking on nervously, so I didn't tell him about this in case I sign him up to something now that he's then got to honour in his talk. Yeah, Luke's going to be talking to you about, you know, how you manage your money and, you know, marriage and all that kind of stuff, and I'm staying well away from that. So that's how we're going to do it, and then at the end, Keith is going to be speaking to you about focusing on mission.

[2 : 17] Okay, so with that all in mind, let me just explain who I work for. Has anyone here heard of the Christian charity CARE? Do you raise your hands? Oh, okay. Okay, anyone of the, you know, younger people? Okay, that's depressing. So CARE actually stands for Christian Action, Research and Education. We're based in London. We're about five minutes from Westminster, so we keep a close eye on everything that is going on in our Parliament, not just here, but also in Scotland as well, and we would do in Northern Ireland if there was a functioning assembly there at the moment. Anyone from Northern Ireland? I'm so sorry if I've just accidentally insulted you, but it's true. There's no functioning government there. It's a bit of a disaster, and so CARE is built upon the idea that every single human being is made in God's image, so we work particularly on life issues like abortion and also end of life like assisted suicide.

We also work on a whole range of issues in between to do with religious liberty, to do with helping problem gamblers. It's a big problem in our society. Protecting children online. We defend and uphold God's version of marriage between a man and a woman, and we also work on family policy as well and how we can use legislation to uphold these values. That's really what we do. I work as the communications manager, so it's my job to try to make sure more people know about who we are and what we're doing, and so some of what I'm going to say this evening will kind of flow out of my work and what I do with CARE and reflecting on some of that, and I don't think it's a big shock if I say this to you. There are big challenges facing our nation. There are big challenges facing us as Christians, and this thorny question of how do we live for Jesus Christ in this day and age is one of the most important questions that we can grapple with. Thinking through what it means to be faithful in a generation completely unlike your parents' generation. This is really, really important, and I don't have all of the answers to that, but it is absolutely brilliant that you're here prepared even to think about it, to grapple with it, and as Peter said, to think through how we can be faithful for Jesus in this day and age. So with that in mind, do take your Bibles if you have one, and we'll turn to 1 Peter and chapter 2. 1 Peter and chapter 2.

1 Peter and chapter 2. 1 Peter and chapter 2.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 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. 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. 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, the 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.

[6 : 03] 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.

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. Let's just bow our heads and pray again.

Amen. Our gracious heavenly Father, as we come to your words, we pray that you would speak to us. We pray that your spirit would be at work in this place. Oh Father, we remember the words of your Son, that we shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from your mouth.

Father, we pray, speak to us in this place that we might be more like the Lord Jesus. Give us wisdom and understanding, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So I've alluded to it already. We're going to particularly focus on verses 9 and 10, but I mentioned the challenges facing us as a nation and as a society and at care. There's a number of things we're especially concerned about, but even just politically, if you're not interested in politics, you probably still have noticed that everything is kind of in a bit of a mess at the moment. We have a prime minister who is interesting. We have a leader of the opposition who is interesting. We have a politics that is interesting. And I'm being incredibly diplomatic. There's much stronger terms that I could use. But even just as a society, you think about where we are right now, you think about some of the things that people love to talk about. Environmental concerns very much at the top of the agenda. This deep-seated worry that the world is going to a very bad place because we're using resources terribly. And therefore, we need to responsibly manage those resources. And woe betide you if you think about having any more than two children, because if you do that, you're doing something unspeakably evil. That seems to be the kind of vibe that we're getting. It's not just pressures there. There's also the whole question of equality as well. How can we make sure that we have a free society for everyone? And women's issues, for example, are very much top of the agenda. Desire to make sure that there's a level playing field for everybody in every profession and so on. And there's a lot that is good in that, but there is also a lot that is more problematic. How do we as Christians engage and grapple with that? How do we think about it? So there's environmental issues. There's equality issues. There's religious liberty issues, as well. The freedom of speech thing. The freedom to believe what we believe and to live it out in the public square. That, too, is under attack. It's under threat. As evidenced by a street preacher who was arrested simply for speaking the Bible in public. As evidenced by a social worker who was kicked off his course at Sheffield because he happened to hold up a traditional, a Christian, a biblical view when it comes to homosexuality. You think about the great movements of our day and age. Think about LGBT, for example, the gay rights movement. They are dominant. They are successful. They have infiltrated. And again, as Christians, the answer cannot be simply, as it were, to throw the baby out the bathwater and say, we're not having anything to do with it. We need to grapple with these things. We need to think through what our response is based on the Bible, drawn from the Bible, but we cannot shirk this challenge.

You know, you have grown up at a time vastly different to when your parents grew up. Completely different. Society has changed so much, so quickly, and none of us know exactly where it's going next.

[9 : 57] Think about the transgender issue, for example. This is another contemporary issue. How do we deal with that? This is a really sensitive topic. You cannot simply become angry about that.

You can, in part, and if I had more time, we could unpack that more, but you cannot simply become angry because there are legitimate issues that we need to think about. A technical term, gender dysphoria, the belief that you are in the wrong body, that is a genuine, horrible, horrendous, difficult, complicated, hard issue to try to grapple with. And we need to be sensitive and grace-filled, but nonetheless absolutely committed to truth. Now, it's absolutely fascinating to think about how these movements have dominated, and it's also really important that when we talk about these movements, we need to be really, really aware of something of that is this. These movements, LGBT, the transgender movement, the equality movement, the environmental movement, they are infiltrating everywhere, and they are seeping into our consciousness through what we take in on social media, through what we watch on Netflix, Amazon Prime, BBC iPlayer, or any other platform that you can find. The soaps, the dramas, all the films, they are busy carefully promoting various agendas. There is nothing neutral out there. And in that context, the New Testament commands to be on your guard, to be watchful, to be careful, are absolutely vital for us today, because these things are coming into the church as well. Big, high-profile examples of prominent

Christian leaders leaving and abandoning the faith, doing so on Instagram, now the great means of communicating to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people. You can see the pressure that has grown. Things seem to be coming, as it were, to a head. And in that context, how do we respond?

What are we to do? These things are serious. These things matter. Just coming back to the trans issue, for example, or even the LGBT issue, what they've done is that they've targeted education, they've targeted schools. They've made sure that they teach their particular worldview in schools to indoctrinate the rising generation so that it is normalized to them.

And we have experienced some of this. I'm sure some of you have experienced it. The same is happening with the media as well. The LGBT movement, they didn't simply get in front of the camera, they went behind the camera. They went into the BBC, they went into the great media corporations, and they tried to get as many people as possible there deliberately to be able to promote their particular cause.

[12 : 36] In that context, what's our response? Can't be panic, it can't be flight, can't be going off into a nunnery or a monastery. It's not a monastery, is it?

Monastery. Dialogue. We can't do that. We're the salt of the earth, we're the light of the world. We are commanded by our Lord and our Saviour, by the King to whom we owe everything.

We are commanded to be in the world, but not of it. So we have this, amidst all of these challenges, this phenomenal opportunity, and Luke's going to unpack this later, this phenomenal opportunity to demonstrate that there is a better story out there.

Now this is something that I am absolutely convinced by. We need to know that better story so that we can tell that better story, because here's the thing, in this world, in our society, these agendas ultimately, ultimately are doomed to fail.

Because they're not built upon a strong foundation. In contrast, here we have something in this passage in front of us that is built, not just upon a strong foundation, but upon the single, greatest, most durable, most brilliant, most fantastic foundation that anything can ever be built upon, and you are part of it.

[13 : 57] You are part of something that is bigger than yourselves. If you think about all of these movements, LGBT, transgender, environmentalism, equality, all of these movements, recognizing there's some good, there's some legitimate stuff in there, but there are big challenges as well, think of them as big building projects.

Think of the Tower of Babel from Genesis 11. They are an attempt by image bearers of God, by God's created people, to rewrite reality itself.

Here is God, the creator, he creates a world, he puts boundaries in place, he establishes what is good. And human beings, in their response, they try to rewrite it. So everything gets flipped around.

But these great building projects, just like the Tower of Babel, are doomed to fail for one reason. They're not built upon a solid foundation. Or to use the imagery of Jesus, they're built upon sand.

Whereas, there is a building project that we have in our passage. Living stone, says Peter. Tied together, bound together, being built up together.

[15 : 03] And all connected to the living stone, that is Jesus, who is also the cornerstone, or the capstone, the foundation stone. And as we're built up on him, that's durable.

That lasts. That's not doomed to fail. And what I want us to do this evening is really quite simple. I want us just to come back to basics. I want us to come back to the foundations.

I want us to come back to two fundamental questions of who we are and what we're here for. It's one of the most amazing privileges that you have as young people.

All of us here, we all share in this great privilege, and that is we're not ignorant of who we are in God's eyes and what we're here for. The purpose for which we exist is revealed to us in God's word.

That's what I want us to think about. Now, you say, well, why? Why think about the foundations? Why go all the way back there? Don't we want to really get to grips with these issues? Yeah, absolutely we want to get to grips with these issues, but we need to make sure that that foundation is in place.

[16 : 06] And in fact, it's something that Peter himself and many of the New Testament writers, no, no, all of the New Testament writers absolutely love to do. Again and again and again, you will find them in Romans, in Corinthians, in Galatians, in Ephesians, in James, in John, in all of the letters of the New Testament, the writers will call you back again and again to the basics of our faith, to the foundation on which we're built.

They will call you back to Christ, which is precisely what we need to do. Before we go anywhere else, before we start thinking about these issues, we go back to Christ. And what a privilege.

What an amazing thing to go back to the single greatest person who ever walked on this earth, to go back to our captain and our leader and our king and our lord and our saviour, to hear him speak to us, to hear him say, this is who you are and this is why you're here.

Every human being deep within them wants to be part of something bigger than themselves. That's why these great movements that I've mentioned attract so many supporters. We have this inbuilt need to feel that we matter.

You're part of something bigger than yourself that is the most phenomenal project, building project that has ever been begun. You are part of this group of people that Peter says you're a chosen people.

[17 : 32] You're part of this great and better story already. So, with all of that in mind, we come back to our foundations and I mentioned the New Testament writers love to do this.

In 2 Peter, Peter's other letter, 2 Peter 1 verse 12, Peter says this, he's just articulated all the gospel blessings that belong to Christians. Then he says, so, verse 12, I will remind you of these things even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

That's how much he wants us to understand. Even though these Christians already know that they are blessed and that God's divine power is at work in them, Peter still will keep reminding them of it.

Well, here we go. We're going to keep reminding ourselves of who we are in Christ and what we're here for. The first thing that we need to notice from this passage is a sharp contrast. A sharp contrast.

You see how verse 9 starts? But, and immediately you see that word, you should be thinking, what's just come before? Well, what's just come before in verse 8? We read about a people, they stumble, verse 8, because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for.

[18 : 37] So here's what Peter's done. He started in verse 4, he's talking about coming to the living stone. And we quickly discover from his use of Old Testament passages that that living stone is none other than Christ himself.

And this living stone has been chosen by God, but rejected by men. Chosen by God, but rejected by men. So he's a divisive figure. He's a dividing figure. And as we come to him, Peter says in verse 5, that we also are being built into a spiritual house like living stones, or a spiritual temple.

And that temple word, it's an Old Testament word, temple was the dwelling place, the meeting place between God and man. So Peter is saying something absolutely extraordinary. He's saying that you believers, those who believe in Jesus, you are the place now where God meets with his people.

Remember, this is New Testament times. The Spirit has been poured out at Pentecost, this great epoch-defining moment in the history of the church where God completes the promises that he made generations ago, and he says, I'm doing something new.

This is the time of a new and better covenant where the Spirit is poured out in full measure upon his people. And like living stones united to Jesus, you are being built up together as the place where God meets with his people.

[19 : 58] An unspeakable privilege. And in that context, we then read that it's all about this cornerstone. You're built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Then, verse 6, for in Scripture it says, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, 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, here's the contrast. The contrast is first about the living stone. He's chosen by God, but he's rejected by men.

But there's another contrast at play here as well. There are those who believe in this living stone. Those who believe in Jesus. And verse 7 in particular, those who believe, that is you, this stone is precious.

Jesus is precious to you. He matters to you. You care about him. More than that, as Peter says in 1 and verse 8, even though you do not see him, you love him. And are filled with joy as a result.

[21 : 01] Inexpressible, glorious joy. We'll think about that tomorrow morning. To you, Jesus matters. You care about what he says to you. You want to live your life based upon his teachings. He's not some dim and distant figure of long, long ago who doesn't have any relevance to today.

He is the single most relevant person in your life. And that word precious to you, he's not just like a distant relative that it's nice to see every now and again. He's not some long lost friend who you Skype once in a blue moon and you don't really care about and if you miss the Skype, you're not bothered.

He is your Lord, your Savior. He's precious to you. He's the most important person. And because of that, you obey him. You structure your life around what he wants.

You take seriously what he says when he says, if you love me, you'll obey my commands. But in contrast to those who do not believe, those who do not entrust themselves, those to whom Christ is not precious, Christ is actually the one that they've rejected and he's a stone, verse 8, that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

And you see this played out. This is the great dividing point in all of humanity. It's not based upon ethnicity. It's not based upon gender.

[22 : 19] It's not based upon anything other than this simple reality. Do you believe in Jesus? Is he precious to you? Or do you reject him? And is he that stone that causes you to stumble and fall?

And actually, when you think about it, what's even more amazing is, for those of us here to whom Jesus is precious, we actually have a description of what we once were like.

Like, at one point in your life, Jesus wasn't precious to you, right? You didn't actually care that much about him, about what he said to you. Peter puts it like this in verse 10, 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. It is absolutely staggering that we're sitting in this room and the person of Jesus Christ matters to you, is precious to you.

This is a miracle. This is a supernatural thing that has happened. You don't wake up one morning and decide, yeah, do you know what? I'll have a bit of this Jesus stuff. Something far, far greater than that has happened to you.

[23 : 27] Once you rejected, now you believe. This is the contrast that Peter is drawing for us, and it is encouraging in two levels. One, it's encouraging that you find yourself in this group of people to whom Jesus is precious.

That is the most amazing thing. We are so unbelievably privileged to be on the side of Jesus Christ. And the promise of the entire Bible is that you are finding yourself on the right side of history by believing in Jesus.

Whatever society says, whatever they may mock you for, whatever they may say about your loyalty to Jesus, you are not wasting your time. I promise you, he is the greatest person ever.

And he matters more than anyone else. It is amazing that you're on his side. It is a wonderful, truly incredible thing. You are part of this phenomenal building project that God is doing.

The great architect, he's building a people for himself. You're part of that. But then secondly, it's encouraging on this level. It's encouraging because there's a sense in which even here, we know that we are part of something that will last.

[24 : 43] Because those who don't believe, he's a stone that causes them to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And particularly that word fall, that idea of not just stumbling and tripping, much more devastating than that.

falling in an absolute sense, which is what will happen to some, means going to hell. Cut off from God in eternal punishment without any hope of escape, without any hope of relief, but not you.

You've been delivered from that. You've been spared from that. You're able to stand before your God because of Christ. This contrast that there is, and when you think about those movements, this is what I was getting at.

If a movement rejects Jesus Christ, a movement is automatically built upon the shakiest foundations imaginable. Whatever success they may seem they have, however prominent and powerful they may seem to be, their foundation is not built to last.

Every ideology, everything that sets itself up against the Lord Jesus and against his church is absolutely guaranteed to fail. That's good news, right?

[25 : 56] Or it's miserable and sad and awful and I'd rather they won. No, no. Christ wins. And we win with Christ. Not because we're better, not because we're stronger, but because somehow, in God's mercy, in his grace, in his love, before the foundation of the world, he chose you.

You know, I look out here, I think, why? Why did God choose me? Why did God choose you? Forgive me, but I'm not looking at people who are any better than anyone else out there.

I'm not looking at the greatest people in Whitby. I've already met them. It's not you. It's not me. This is the wonder of the gospel.

It's the wonder of what God does. He takes people who deserve hell. He changes them. And he makes them part of this spiritual building project, even though we don't deserve it.

In that, Peter then builds on this contrast by saying, but, verse 9, so we come then to who we are. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

[27 : 07] Language might seem strange to us. Peter is very deliberately borrowing Old Testament language because he's making a very simple point. He's writing to a group of churches in mostly modern-day Turkey and he's saying to them, in effect, you, you are the true Israel.

You are the people of God. Remember in Old Testament, God chose Israel out of all the nations, gave them promises, gave them blessings, gave them special privileges, gave them a land. He was their God.

They were his people. But only for one race, only for one ethnicity, with a few exceptions. Well now, in this new age, in this age of the Spirit, now Peter is applying those same terms to Jews and Gentiles, to those who were not Jews.

He's saying to Jew and to Gentile, together, you are the people of God. And this first expression here, you are a chosen people. Well it means what it says, that God has sovereignly chosen you.

He's selected you, he's picked you, he's set his love upon you, and he's done it based upon his foreknowledge. He knew you before you were born. From the very foundation of the world, God has chosen you.

[28 : 12] That is from creation itself, God has chosen you. It's not some kind of lucky dip, by the way. It's not like there's this massive bowl, and there's lots of names in it, and God goes blind like that, pick, pick, pick, pick, pick.

Oh look, you're in. He has chosen you, knowing you as a person. You say, well, I don't understand, I don't deserve it. No, no, that's the point.

You don't deserve it. But he's still done it. This is absolutely incredible. Not one of us here deserves to be a recipient of the mercy and the love of God or the grace of God, yet here we are, loving Jesus, desiring to live for him, all because of his grace and mercy.

And Peter even says that, doesn't he? Verse 10, once you are not a people, now you are a people. Once you had not received mercy, now you have received mercy. Mercy is God's kindness forgiveness towards people who don't deserve it.

We do not serve a God who is distant, a God who is uninvolved, a God who is disinterested in his own people. We serve a God who loves you with an unimaginably great love.

[29 : 18] As supremely revealed in Jesus Christ, you literally cannot be more loved than you are. It's not like God has just with a pipette dripped a bit of love on you.

He's got a big bucket, massive. And all that God is, Father, Son and Spirit, he has just poured on you.

He chose you, not because there's anything in you that deserved to be chosen. He chose you because he chose you. His choice, his love, his grace, his mercy.

And it is only his grace and it is only his mercy that mean you're on this side, the right side. How humbling is that? Does it humble you?

It is a phenomenal thing. God has chosen you. But secondly, you're a royal priesthood. So you wear the big gown and you get to walk up and down with the dispenser.

[30 : 22] You know, you ever seen that? Put in the incense over people? No. No, no. This is, I shouldn't go into this. I'm going to run out of time. This is incredible what Peter's saying here.

There was an entire reformation that included division about this point. In the Old Testament, priests were those who had special privileges. They could go to the Holy of Holies. They could get close to God. They were responsible under God for leading worship.

They had access that other people in God's economy did not have. They were a set-apart tribe. Now, God is saying to you, you're all priests.

That means you all have access to God equally. There's no hierarchy going on here. Your pastor does not have more access than you do. Your elder does not have more access than you do.

It doesn't matter if you are the youngest here or the oldest here. It doesn't matter if you're a new Christian or if you've been a Christian for decade after decade. Every one of us alike through Jesus has the same access to God.

[31 : 23] More than that, royal priesthood means you're here to serve God. That's what priests did. They were those particularly responsible for serving God. That's what you're here to do. Every one of us united, equal, under God in this mission.

But the stress here is on the fact that you are a royal priesthood. You're not just any priesthood. You're a royal priesthood. That is, you are in the same line as the high priest, Jesus himself, who is the great priest.

Because he's king too, because he's the kingly priest, you too are in that royal line. You belong to that same order. Access to God. Service to God. That's what Peter's saying.

He's getting at why we're here. But more than that, again, you get to go to the creator of the entire universe, the one who hung the stars in the sky, who made everything by the word of his power, the only almighty living God that there is.

You get to go to him whenever, wherever, in Jesus' name, and he will hear you. Actually, you could go further. He absolutely loves it when you pray to him. He loves to hear you pray.

[32 : 33] Doesn't get bored. Doesn't switch off. Doesn't shrug and go. Not again. He loves it. I mean, again, this is ridiculous.

We don't deserve this. None of us do, but we have access to this great God. We're a royal priesthood. We have access and then we serve. And then thirdly, we're a holy nation.

That is, God is holy. We know that from the whole of the Bible. Remember Isaiah 6? What were they saying around the throne of God? Holy, holy, holy. As the Lord God Almighty, there is something unique and distinct about our God.

Holy, the word means set apart. It means that it's distinct. It's special. It's reserved just for God. Well, you are reserved just for God and you are set apart by God to be different from those around about you.

So the values that you hold to, the values that you spread, they're automatically going to be different from the world's because you are a holy nation, a holy people, a holy race, a holy group who are called to reflect something of God's character in this world.

[33 : 39] That's why Jesus says you're the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Do you know something? The world would be even worse. Our society would be even worse if it wasn't for you. Not because you're brilliant, brilliant people, but because simply by being Christian, you are the salt of the earth.

You're seasoning this world. You're making it better. You're preserving. And then you're the light. You're those who are called to point people to the truth, to reflect the character of our great God to all that you come into contact with.

This is a high calling, a serious responsibility, but packed with privilege because the alternative is so much worse. You're a people set apart for God, called to reflect God's character, and then you're God's special possession.

God owns everything, right? Everything in the universe belongs to him. He holds the universe in the palm of his hand.

He wrote the laws of physics. He wrote every law of science. He wrote any mathematical formula that you could ever think of. All of us who are in those fields, and I am not in those fields, but all of us who are in those fields, you are only thinking God's thoughts after him.

[34 : 50] He owns everything, and yet you, you're his special possession. Well, think about it. Why is that so? Because of what it cost him to get you.

He had to give up his only son to suffer the scorn and the shame of dying on a cross, bearing your sin in his body, feeling the wrath of God poured out upon him.

See him in the garden of Gethsemane. See him on his knees. See him sweating drops of blood as he contemplates all that is to come. Hear him on that cross, that pitiful cry.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He said that so that you never would have to say it. God sent his son, that which was most precious to him, to make you his special possession.

And there's a sense in which it should floor us, leave us on our knees, leave us asking ourselves, why do I not experience something more of the humility that should naturally follow from such truth?

[36 : 06] that God, holy, pure, untainted by sin, would do that much for me? But he has.

Willingly, happily, joyfully, to the point where you're his special possession and as Habakkuk teaches us, he sings over you.

he literally sings over you. You mean that much to him. You're not an afterthought. You're not here by accident.

God has chosen you. God has saved you. God has brought you into his holy nation to be among his royal priesthood, to be his special possession. And then finally, what's the great purpose?

Why are we here? We are here to worship God. Verse 9, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

[37 : 04] Once in darkness, spiritually unable to see, dead to God, dead to the world, dead under sin, under Satan's control, now in his wonderful light, truth has dawned in your life.

You have been completely changed, all because of God's action. You see how God-centric these verses are. It is all about God. It is all about what God has done in Christ. So here we are, we come to him, we ask, Lord, you've done all this.

What am I to do? You are to declare the praises of him who has done all of this for you. What does it mean to declare his praises? You say, ah, it means to sing hymns. That's what we think of.

It means so much more than that. Every single part of your life given to God in praise, so that your conversation, your thoughts, the attitudes of your heart, your relationships with others, your relationships with your family, your service in the local church, your work, in whichever discipline or field it might be, every part of your life given over to God, fully submitted to him.

You are the ones who are given the truth that you may declare the reality of who God is. You are the ones who go out and tell people that there is one God, that he is glorious, that he is great, that he is almighty, that he is full of grace, that he is love in himself.

[38 : 20] You are the ones who declare the reality that God is the judge of all and that he always does right. You are the ones who declare the truth about God's ways being the best ways.

You are the ones who have the privilege of going out and telling the best story that has ever been written because you are part of it. We are unbelievably privileged as God's people.

There is nothing and nobody more privileged than you in this room, not financially, not in terms of your background, but in terms of what God has done for you. There is a very real sense in which God could not do more than he has already done for you and yet he will because the story is not finished.

You think about how privileged you are now. You wait until Christ returns, until all is made new. When you see him face to face, you wait till that day.

This is the greatest calling that there is, the greatest privilege that there is because we worship the great and greatest God that there is.

[39 : 35] And again, all because of his mercy. Who are you? unlike those who stumble, unlike those who fall, unlike those who disobey the message, somehow, because of God, because of his grace and his mercy, you are chosen.

You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a special possession by God, as loved as Jesus is by the Father.

and he has done all of this, that every part of your life might be to his praise and his glory. And you will learn something as you seek to put God first in your life.

You will learn stumblingly, failing at times, but over time, that that really is true life in harmony with your creator, seeking with his help to live for him.

You are the most privileged of people, along with every believer all over the world right now. God calls you to this mission, to declare his praises to everybody that you see.

[40 : 53] Yeah, yeah, society is in a mess, sure. And things are going in a really, really bad direction at the moment. But don't forget your foundation. Solid, locked in, absolutely secure.

The greatest foundation that there is, Jesus himself. So I finish by urging you to do exactly what Peter says in verse 4, as you come to him, as you come to him daily, as you come to Christ daily, think about Christ.

Christ. Just think about an aspect of who he is. Think about something that he did when he was here upon earth. Think about what he did for you on the cross. There's so much for you to feast your mind and your heart on.

Come to Christ in faith, trusting in him, day by day by day. And he will help you to declare his praises in this generation.

That's our calling. That's why we're here. We're not here for ourselves. We're here for him to make Christ known and to give everything that we have for his cause. We are the most blessed people that there is and it's all because of God and it's all because of Christ.

[42 : 12] Let's pray together. Amen. Father, we praise you and we thank you for these astonishing blessings that you've given to us.

We pray that you would help us to reflect on them and as we do so, we pray that by your spirit indwelling each one of us that something of the truth and the wonder of the privilege that is ours and the mission that you've given us would become more real to us.

Father, as we live for you in this broken world, we pray that we would do so with courage, knowing that our foundation is secure. We pray that we would come daily to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and in trust.

Father, we pray that you'd help us when we're discouraged, when we're disquieted, when we're afraid to remember who we are in your eyes. Thank you for all that you have done for us.

And Father, in everything that we do, we pray that you would help us to declare your praises, to join with the angels and all those who have gone before in making you known and singing about you and telling about you and living for you.

[43 : 42] Father, amidst our own difficulties and trials, we pray that we would keep these things in mind. And that we would be encouraged, each one in our souls, to live for you confidently, expectantly, in this generation.

In our weakness, please give us your grace and your strength. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's finish by singing. I'm going to sing number 35 in the hymn book.

Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord's unnumbered blessings. Give my spirit voice.

35. 35. unnumbered blessings. Give my spirit voice, voice tender to me, the promise of his word.

In God, my Savior, my Savior, shall my heart rejoice. Tell out my soul, the greatness of his name.

[45 : 15] Make known his might. Let Jesus' arm has done, His mercy sure, promise to raise the same.

His holy name, love of the mighty heart. Tell out my soul, the greatness of his might.

As and dominions, lay their glory. Thy proud hearts and star, then wills are put to fight.

The hungry, let the humble lift it high. Tell out my soul, the glories of his word.

Furn is his promise, and his mercy sure. Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord.

[46 : 36] To children, children, and for heavenmore. To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence, without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.