

Series: God of All Grace

Message: Chosen and Set Apart / Jeff Kennedy / April 26, 2020

Introduction: I told a family in our church in Kennewick, WA where I served as a youth pastor in my early 20's that I wanted to learn guitar. They gave me a cheap old, plywood Yamaha guitar that they found in a dumpster and glued the neck back together. I was so proud it.

I tried to teach myself—but my playing just sounded like clumsy clanking chords. After hearing me play in worship service, that family also gave me a year's worth of guitar lessons with an old guitar teacher named Jim. Jim was a gentleman in his 60's who looked like he'd played in every bar on the west coast.

At my first lesson, I entered his studio, sat down and introduced myself. I took my beat up old raggedy guitar and began to try and tune it. After 5 minutes of fumbling confusion, Jim said, "Hey can I tune that for ya?" I handed it to him and he tuned it in 30 second. Then, to my surprise, he began flat picking bluegrass, switched to rock n'roll, then country, blues. Jim, was a virtuoso—a master player. Then said, "So, what type of playing do you want to learn?" In the hands of a master, the worst dumpster guitar can sound amazing.

We think of the Apostle Peter as this water-walking, tongue talking, dynamic preaching soul winning machine for the Gospel. A leader among leaders. A passionate teacher and miracle worker. But he could only play those tunes, and hit those notes because he had been plucked from obscurity—from backwater Galilee. And the dead-end life in hard labor as a fisherman; this salvage-life in the hands of Jesus the master—he was made to sing the perfect melody of the Gospel.

Today we're beginning a new series and we're going to learn from a guy who knows what it's like to be a nobody from nowhere Galilee. To fail despite his best efforts. He knows exactly how it feels to become overtaken by his own blustery nature. He's experienced the shame and agony of personal defeat in his devotion to Jesus. But, he also has one quality, one trait that is admirable, even enviable—he just keeps coming back for more, putting himself in the hands of the Master—Jesus.

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His friend and fellow disciple, Judas, wound up committed suicide because he became a conspirator against Jesus. And because he just couldn't handle the crushing weight of his failure.

His other close friends also abandoned their quest in Jesus's greatest hour of need. The shepherd was struck. The sheep scattered.

And Peter, the great apostle who was the first to receive a revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, the unique Son of the Living God—repeatedly denied Jesus too.

He failed Jesus, but he never gave up. He just kept coming back, putting himself into the hands of the Master.

Decades after the Jesus movement was born, after the church was scattered into every corner and alcove of the Roman Empire—the message of Jesus catching like a grassfire in high wind, the message going viral before that was a “thing”—churches of Jesus the Messiah are springing up in every town, every city, every neighborhood—and Rome can't get control of it.

Purpose of the Letter: So Peter the apostle dictates a letter of encouragement to Christians scattered like exiles throughout the nations.

Message: And his message is very simply this “You are the people of God in an increasingly hostile world, and the God of all grace will safeguard the Gospel trust until the day he returns for you.”

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ:

- Peter—that name reminds the believer of a life of taking risks for Jesus. Don't be afraid to make bold moves as a Christian. You might fail. You might even fall into sin. And you might even find yourself in a real dilemma that Jesus has to rescue you out of—like blundering out of a boat and walking on water. But don't be afraid to follow Jesus and take some risks and fall on your face sometimes.

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- Notice Peter immediately turns to his identity in Jesus. He distinguishes himself by his calling. He identifies with the person that the Master has made and is making. You and I are to do the same. Which he's going to do in verse two.
- Be quick to confess the truth about Jesus. Peter spoke up on behalf of the other disciples in Matthew 16. He stepped out and said something they all knew was true, but their Jewish culture would not allow them to utter a word it. It was so taboo, so forbidden. But Peter says what everyone suspects. Jesus, you are the Christ—and more than that—you are the Son of the Living God. That first part wasn't particularly controversial for Jews. All of them were **waiting for the Messiah. But the second part of his statement** was particularly problematic. Saying that God had a unique Son was equivalent to blasphemy—because in Jewish faith, God is the one and only. God alone is God. They are God's people, Israel, and they are to *shema* "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the LORD is one." So to say that God had a "son"—the only unique Son from eternity was blasphemous and when no other Jew dared say it. When no other Jew would think about uttering words like this, Peter goes first. He speaks up and he speaks the truth. Don't be afraid to speak the truth in love to your neighbors. Most of them hold false beliefs about Jesus. But like Peter, the apostle of Jesus the Messiah—We are called to make bold moves for the Kingdom of God. Called to speak boldly about who Jesus is and what he does for all who believe.

To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

The modern region he's referring to here is Turkey. The cities he's mentioned are strategic administrative centers in the Roman empire. And the Christian church is flourishing in these regions and the down side to that is their success for the Gospel has gotten the attention of those who are opposed to the Gospel message.

Listen, the devil will leave you and I alone so long as we leave him alone. Stay out of his territory, don't tell those who are bound by deception, don't minister to those whom he has captive to addiction, sex, or leisure—don't bring the light of the truth into their darkness. Because if you do—he will try to shut you down. He'll bring pain, suffering, persecution, loss—whatever he can marshal to shut you up from reflecting the character of Jesus and the truth of Christ in a hostile world.

Now, there is a lot of very Jewish and Christian theology packed into that brief paragraph. Let's take a minute and break it down.

The first thing he says to these Jewish and Gentile Christians is...

1. We were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. For a Jew, they viewed themselves to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood among the tribes of men, to be the special possession of God. God had chosen them according to his foreknowledge, from eternity past he set them apart by choosing Abraham and his line through Isaac, Jacob—and through Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel (Jacob's new name). God chose one man to bring forth a new nation. And from that nation he chose one man who would bring forth a new nation—made up of every tribe, every ethnicity, every language and people group—the people of God both Jew and Gentile—chosen from before the foundations of the world. Set apart as God's special possession. Now, that sounds like a grand idea.

- Let's bring that theology to your doorstep. Do you think of yourself included in that? Do you take time to reflect on just how special it is to be the chosen people of God. To know that before he decreed the worlds he had you in mind.
- **Illus. A couple of years after we got married, I was talking with my wife's mom Carletta about all the "coincidental" run-ins with Kerri.** Once I realized that there was a design behind "getting me" or getting my attention—I felt so good. That all these things I thought were coincidental, or happenstance, there was actually a designing mind behind it—to seek me out, to reveal the truth in Christ to me, to call me his own and bring me into the family. It's so encouraging to know that I was wanted. Pursued. That someone was after me because they valued me and loved me before I even knew I was loved.

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- Believer, take no offense at the fact that before the creation of the world you were loved, chosen and predestined to be God's own special possession.
- **Living as exiles, scattered as diaspora (scattered ones) among the nations.** This is a direct allusion to the exiled Jews under Senacherib (northern Kingdom) and the Nebuchadnezzar (the southern Kingdom). Peter is applying this language which is trademarked by the Jews to the people of God, Jew and Gentile, who are believers in Christ dispersed throughout the Roman world. Why is that important? Because as believers and citizens of the Kingdom of God, we live as foreigners in our world today. Our citizenship is in heaven and we are ambassadors of Jesus, emissaries of his Kingdom, envoys of his realm, representing that realm where God's rule is not challenged. Remember that prayer that Jesus gave the disciples to pray? Your Kingdom come, your will be *done on earth as it is in heaven*. How is God's will done in heaven? I'll venture to say, without a challenger. Unhindered and unimpeded. The fact of the matter is we are citizens and ambassadors of a realm where God's rule is supreme. And that Kingdom sometimes has competing truths, values, and a code of ethics. It also has a different atmosphere. In the kingdoms and countries of this world, we breathe the often toxic air of discord and dissent, civil unrest, fear, heartbreak, and loneliness. We breathe the air of a culture that all too often embraces moral insanity, exchanging the truth of God's Kingdom for lies, and where everyone has a tribe, a tribal god/idol, and true peace and security seems so elusive—just out of range.
- **Illustration:** Think about this pandemic. It has exposed and brought to light the fact that we are hopelessly divided as a nation. The political climate is not a *cum ba yah* moment here. It's vitriol, animosity. And it's depressing and disheartening to watch the media attack the president and his team, and watch the president of country rip them a new one on national TV everyday.

And then the Christian community comes along—we are an outpost of the Kingdom of God established in hostile territory. We breathe a different kind of air—unity of the faith, forgiveness, grace, and tellers of the truth about God and Jesus, men and women, heaven and hell—and the coming Kingdom of God. We're just a different kind of people. A holy nation, peculiar people. Strange folk

who seem to run on another kind of animating source of life—peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Faith and confidence even while our world looks like its falling apart.

This is what it looks like to be stable and this is what it looks like to be undivided.

We are the exiles, scattered and dispersed in Idaho Falls, Boise, Moscow and Couerd'Alene. People of a different Kingdom.

2. Set apart by the Spirit. So we're not just chosen to get our tickets punched, get our fire insurance from everlasting damnation, so that we can escape the coming judgment which will come upon the whole world. We were chosen in Him that we might be sanctified by the work of the Spirit.

- **Sanctification means to be set apart for a special purpose.** It is the OT idea of consecration. Setting something aside for a special purpose, for a special use in the household.

Illustration: Do any of you men live with certain items in your home that are set aside for *special* occasions. In our home, there is an entire taxonomy, like a hierarchy of dish towel use. And if you go into Kerri's Norwex drawer and use here nice, expensive Norwex towels, to say, wipe up coffee spills—a silent alarm will go off (that only mamma can here) and she will descend on you like a dish ninja and you are in trouble. You use her special stuff for average ordinary things, and that is it.

Illustration: My friend whose mom had plastic covers on her nice expensive velour couches. We'd come in from the hot VA sun and sit on those plastic covers and your skin would stick to them—ugh. They were awful. Why did she cover those? Because they were for special purposes—dinner guests.

Sanctification is like that. It is a religious term. It means to be set apart. Now, the Christian is set apart by fits and starts. You have been set apart and sanctified,

but you and I are also in progress. We are in the progress of being continually set apart for what?

- **Set apart by the smattering of blood**—in the Jewish sacrificial system, the blood of an animal sacrifice would be sprinkled or smattered all over the mercy seat and touching every aspect of the furnishings in the Holy of Holies—the innermost sanctum of the temple. This is the metaphor that Peter is using. God included Gentile believers in his holy family by covering us with the blood of his one and only Son—the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world.
- **Sanctification to obedience**—we aren't saved merely positionally, the presence of the Holy Spirit has been richly poured out into our lives that we might walk in obedience to God's Word. Paul says, it is for freedom that Christ set you free. There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law—the power of sin and death.

Illustration: I got suspended 6 times in the 5th grade. The last time I got suspended the principle and my teachers warned my parents that the next time would be the last—I was going to be expelled from school. I think it's fair to say that I was disobedient. I hated following other people's rules. My natural independent spirit was rebellious, disobedient. I was a very eccentric kid and just couldn't stand following the rules. When I became a believer in Jesus there was an immediate, miraculous change in me—my heart became willing and obedient to God's Word. I wanted to live in surrender to his Lordship of my life. Why? Because I had been transformed by the power of Jesus's forgiveness, transformed inwardly.

But I still as a teenager, at times, got suspended from highschool. I spent all five years in highschool trying to push back, kick against the grain of my sinful nature.

And I eventually learned civil obedience from spiritual obedience. There was no way that I was going to live in open defiance of God's precious word. His words in

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Scripture were too important to me. Too cherished and highly prized—and God taught me to move from unhealthy fiercely independent spirit—a rebel wrecking my life—God moved me from that to a person who is willingly surrendering my heart, mind and body to Jesus’s teachings.

That’s sanctification. It is the process of being set apart, consecrated to the purposes of God, conformed to the image and likeness of God’s obedient Son—by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us through spiritual disciplines.

Do we do that for salvation. No. We do that because of salvation. Do we conform our lives to the pattern of godliness, developing a passion for truth and God’s word because we want to merit salvation? No. We do it overwhelmed with gratitude because he first loved us. He first gave himself for us.

Summary: He took the initiative to love me and chose me before the foundation of the world. You and I are his prized possession, the apple of his eye, the reason for his passion and suffering on the cross—the motive for his vindication in resurrection. To save us. To forgive us. To bring us from the rebel-kingdom of this present age of darkness into the Kingdom of his glorious Son. That we might become participants in Trinitarian life. That we might know the joy of having been sought after, discovering the design behind all those coincidences, being saved, washed with the blood of Jesus, positionally seated in heavenly realms and experientially being transformed by the inner working of the Spirit in sanctification.

If we knew all that, then as Peter said. The grace and peace of Jesus would be multiplied to us. That’s my prayer for you.

Let’s pray...

Jesus would you help us in this time to grasp how wide, how deep, how vast is the love of Christ for us?

Would help us to see that you had designs on us from the beginning, seeking and saving that which was lost?

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Would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus—that we might be filled to the fullest measure of your Spirit. That we might be changed from one degree of reflecting your glory to the next as we look onward to resurrection glory. Amen.