

A Peculiar People

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A Peculiar People

For the grace of God which bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared; Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Titus 2:11-14

The everlasting Gospel, or the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is filled with “exceeding great and precious promises,¹” such as Zion and eternal life, and these promises bring joy and comfort to many people. However, even though we find so many beautiful assurances in God’s word, it can be a struggle for the saints to not be distracted with the things of the world, whether by the latest entertainment, sports, politics, or even moving into a new apartment or home.

Jesus told the disciples that the world would hate them because they were not a part of the world, saying, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own.”² The words of Christ should resonate with us today, essentially those disciples that have taken up the cross, are called to be in the world but not of it. Nonetheless, what does it mean to be in the world but not of it? Does it mean that we should seclude ourselves from the world by retreating into our homes and churches, or perhaps is there more to Christ’s calling? To answer the question simply, yes. Not only does our Savior not want us to be of the world, but He desires for us to become sons and daughters of God who are also citizens of the Kingdom of God. In other words, the Lord desires for us to become a peculiar people. Please read the following Scripture from Titus 2:11-14:

2:11 For the grace of God which bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared; **2:12** Teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;** **2:13** Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; **2:14** Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself ***a peculiar people***, zealous of good works.

Many people in the Church today prefer to substitute the word “peculiar” with word “distinctive.” However, the word “distinctive” does not fully define what it means to be peculiar, nor does it give it justice. The 1828 Webster’s Dictionary defines the word peculiar as meaning “appropriate; belonging to a person and to *him only*; *exclusive* property; that which belongs to a person in *exclusion of others*.” By walking into the waters of baptism and taking upon us the name of Christ, we have witnessed to God

¹ 2 Peter 1:4

² John 15:19

that we are His sons and daughters, or in other words, that we are exclusively His. Further, it is important to understand, “Ye are bought with a price,³” which is by the blood of Jesus Christ.

A Peculiar Treasure

In Titus, chapter two, Paul wrote that Jesus Christ would purify unto Himself a peculiar people, and the Master has also said in the Doctrine and Covenants, “I will raise up unto myself a pure people, that will serve me in righteousness.” The word pure means without spot, clean, unmixed, or free from anything improper, and God is seeking such a people to worship Him in truth and to keep His commandments. Thus, the Lord calls for His people to separate themselves from those worldly lusts and to live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” The following Scripture from Deuteronomy 26:16-19, is a portion of God’s covenant with Israel; however, it also speaks with us today:

26:16 This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments; thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. **26:17** Thou hast **avouched the Lord** this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice; **26:18** And the Lord hath **avouched thee** this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; **26:19** And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor; and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.

The covenant of baptism, both of the water and the Spirit, is very similar to the Scripture above. In essence, we have avouched, or affirmed, to be a peculiar people for the Lord, meaning that we have stated in our baptism that we would serve Him with our whole heart and soul, that we would not leave Him or forsake Him, and that we would hearken to His voice. Further, we have not only covenanted with the Lord that we will be His sons and daughters, but also that He and He alone is our God.

King Benjamin explained that we should always retain the name of Jesus Christ written in our hearts, as there is no other name given whereby mankind can receive salvation, and that we should know the voice by which we are called. However, he said further, “How knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?⁴” In order to know the thoughts of God we must have the Spirit of God, which the Lord has promised to His peculiar people if we keep His commandments. Please read the prayers over the bread and wine which God has given to the members of His Church from Moroni 4:4 and Moroni 5:3:

4:4 O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God the eternal Father, that they are willing to

³ 1 Corinthians 7:23

⁴ Mosiah 3:17

take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he has given them, **that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.** Amen.

5:3 O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son which was shed for them, that they may witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they do always remember him, **that they may have his Spirit to be with them.** Amen.

Wherefore, God has avouched that if we would keep His commandments, then the Holy Ghost will abide within us, which will purify and sanctify our hearts that we may be pure even as Jesus Christ is pure [read Moroni 7:53]. Moreover, God has avouched that if we would hearken to His voice and be His people, then He will be our God. In Exodus, chapter nineteen, the Lord told Moses, “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine; And ye shall be unto me a *kingdom* of priests, and a holy nation.⁵”

In the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus Christ said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.⁶” The sons and daughters of God *are* the Lord’s treasure, and when we keep the everlasting covenant then we become exclusively God’s, which is the desire of God for each and every soul. Jesus said, “Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you, that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me; and my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, I might draw *all men unto me.*”⁷

God has labored with all His might for His vineyard, “to purify unto himself a peculiar people.” In Jacob, chapter three, God said, “But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened my hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay; I have nourished it, and have I digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long...what could I have done more for my vineyard?”⁸

Similar to the parable of the treasure hid in the field and the parable the pearl of great price, the Lord has found a treasure in His people and He has sold all that He has, even His Son Jesus Christ, to purchase that treasure. In the seventy-second Psalm, David wrote that the Son of God “shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall be *their blood* in his sight.”⁹ Nonetheless, are we willing to give away all our sins to purchase the Kingdom of God, and to become a “peculiar treasure” unto God? Please read the Lord’s calling for us through the apostle Peter in the following Scripture from 1 Peter 2:9-12:

⁵ Exodus 19:5-6

⁶ Matthew 6:21

⁷ 3 Nephi 12:25-26

⁸ Jacob 3:100-102, 109

⁹ Psalms 72:13-14

2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, ***a peculiar people***; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; **2:10** Which in time past were not a people, ***but are now the people of God***; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

2:11 Dearly beloved, **I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims**, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; **2:12** Having your conduct honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, **glorify God** in the day of visitation.

Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth

In Deuteronomy, chapter fourteen, God told Israel, “For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself.”¹⁰ Although this verse was directed to Israel, it also applies to the citizens of the Kingdom of God [see how we enter the Kingdom by reading **Chapters Three and Eight**]. God has called us to be His peculiar people, which requires for us to put to death that old body of sin and walk in a newness of life. “Wherefore...though we once lived after the flesh, yet since we have known Christ, now henceforth live we *no more* after the flesh. Therefore if any man live in Christ, he is ***a new creature***; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”¹¹

In order to show ourselves approved to God, we must both lay aside and deny every worldly lust, which we do not do only because the Lord has commanded us to, but also because we love God with all our might, mind, and strength. How do we deny every worldly lust? The answer is simply to love Jesus Christ more than anything the world has to offer. In the John’s first epistle, he wrote to the members of the church, saying that because of their faith in Jesus Christ and because the word of God that abided in them, they were able to overcome both the wicked one and the world. Please read the following Scriptures from 1 John 2:15-17, 1 John 4:4, and 1 John 5:4-5; 15:

2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father ***is not in him***. **2:16** For all in the world that is of the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. **2:17** And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God ***abideth forever***.

4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because ***greater is he*** that is in you, than he that is in the world...**5:4** For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. **5:5** Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?...**5:18** We know that whosoever is born of God **continueth not in sin**; but he that is begotten of God and keepeth himself, that wicked one ***overcometh him not***.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 14:2

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Mormon asked the question, “Why do you not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness, that that misery which never dies, because of the praise [or things] of the world?¹²” Why do we put such a great value on movies, sports, television, material items, etc., when they can never fill our soul with everlasting life? Instead, we must turn to Jesus Christ, who is the fountain of living waters. [Read more on the fountain of living waters in **Chapter Eleven**] What could be more peculiar than a people who live in the world, but are not of it? What could be more peculiar than a people who are strangers to the world?

Paul summarized in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews some of the most faithful servants of God that are found in the Old Testament, and in particular he explained how these servants were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Please read the following passage from Hebrews 11:13-16:

11:13 These [the faithful servants of the Lord] all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were ***strangers and pilgrims on the earth***. **11:14** For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. **11:15** And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity ***to have returned***. **11:16** But now they desire a better country, that is, ***a heavenly***; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for ***he hath prepared for them a city***.

The above Scripture explained that the fathers of Israel died without receiving the physical manifestations of the promises that God had given to them. Nevertheless, they embraced the promises in faith and sought for a heavenly country. The Lord commanded Abraham when he was seventy-five years old to depart from the land of Haran with his family, and showed Abraham a land in which God would make him a great nation. Although Israel would not dwell in the Promised Land until hundreds of years later, Abraham hearkened to the voice of God and departed. It is important to understand that at any point Abraham could have chosen to return to his old land, but he did not because he sought for a *better* country.

Furthermore, because Abraham obeyed the Lord and sought for a country that he would not receive during his life, he avouched himself to be a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, or in other words to be in the world but not of it. God has called the latter day saints to also be strangers and pilgrims on the earth. However, instead of departing from a physical land, we are required to depart from all of the things of the world and to look “for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” Please read how Abraham embraced the promise from Romans 4:19-25

4:19 And being ***not weak in faith***, he [Abraham] considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; **4:20** He ***staggered not at the promise*** of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; **4:21** And being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, ***he was able also to perform***. **4:22** And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

¹² Mormon 4:53

4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; **4:24** *But for us also*, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; **4:25** Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.

God has commanded His peculiar people to build up His Kingdom and establish the cause of Zion. Therefore, it is important that we remove ourselves out of Babylon for the “task of establishing Zion presses heavily upon us. Barriers and hindrances to the achievement of this goal should be removed as speedily as possible and practicable.¹³” Nevertheless, it is more than simply removing the things of the world out of our life, but filling that time with serving God. Please read the following testimony:

For a long time I never realized how engrossed in the world I really was. I didn't think that there was anything wrong with sitting down and watching sports or playing a video game. Now, while some of these things do not appear to be inherently evil, they were a distraction that caused me to look downward instead of upward.

I never realized why it bothered me so much to take part in these activities until much later, but over time, through the strength of Jesus Christ, the Lord was able to slowly remove many of the worldly things from my heart that I had once taken so much pleasure in. It wasn't until after these things began to be removed that the Lord helped me to see more clearly. Essentially, these things of the world were like the mists of darkness that Lehi and Nephi saw in their visions of the Tree of Life, or in Geneses, chapter seven, when Enoch saw Satan holding a great chain that covered the whole world in darkness. These things blind us, and prevent us from drawing closer to Jesus Christ. Although they don't appear to be evil, they are incredibly dangerous to our salvation and to the building of God's Kingdom. They are especially dangerous because they are so subtle that we don't see them, and we often times do not understand that they are in fact evil. Anything that draws us away from Jesus is not of God.

However, one thing that the Lord has taught me is that as we remove these things of the world from our lives, we must fill that void with serving the Lord. Moreover, instead of having the mindset of, “I'm going to stop watching so much television and fill that time with studying the Scriptures,” we need to approach it as, “I desire to study the Scriptures and that's what I'm going to do.” As we begin to keep God's commandments, those things of the world will fall by the way side and be burned away. As God promised, when we keep His commandments the Holy Ghost will abide with us always.

Wherefore, it is important while we still have today, that we prepare our hearts and souls to meet God by giving up all of our sins to know Jesus Christ, which requires a continual process of drawing nearer to God. For an example, it took Noah approximately a hundred years to build the ark. However, if Noah had procrastinated the building of the ark until God had given him only seven days to put the ark in order, he would not have had enough time to build the massive boat [read Genesis 8:32].

¹³ DC 138:3a-b

Likewise, in the eleventh chapter of Mosiah, the Lord warned Alma that the armies of King Noah were coming to destroy his people. However, if Alma had not been spiritually prepared, if his heart was not broken and contrite, or if he was not waiting on God, how would the people of Alma have been able to escape? The same lesson should be applied to our own lives, we must begin to prepare and wait on the Lord even now. If we are not spiritually ready, such as the five wise virgins who brought oil for their lamps, then we may find that the door is shut to us, which is not the desire of God for anyone.

Tabernacle of God

Paul explained in the second chapter of Ephesians that without Jesus Christ we are “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.¹⁴” God has called His saints to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth and instead to seek for Zion. However, as in all things, God has given us our agency. Thus, we have the power to choose one of two options; we can either be strangers to God, or to be strangers to the world.

In the second book of Nephi, Nephi wrote, “Therefore cheer up your hearts, and remember you are free to act for yourselves; to choose the way of everlasting death, or the way of eternal life.¹⁵” Wherefore, let us become strangers to the world, and draw closer to Jesus Christ that we might be God’s peculiar people. Please read the following Scripture passage from Ephesians 2:18-22:

2:18 For through him (Jesus Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. **2:19** Now therefore ye are ***no more*** strangers and foreigners, but ***fellow citizens*** with the saints, and of the household of God; **2:20** And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone**; **2:21** In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; **2:22** In whom ye also are builded together for an ***habitation of God*** through the Spirit.

The members of the Church of Jesus Christ are called to be citizens in the Kingdom of God, and to build their foundation on the Son of God that they might be united through Christ and be a “habitation of God through the Spirit.” In the first letter to the Corinthians, we read, “What! know ye not that your body is ***the temple*** of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.¹⁶”

As we have already read, by keeping the commandments of God, God has promised that we will always have His Spirit to be with us, and this was a part of God’s plan from the foundation of the world in order to prepare the way for us to dwell with Him. Jesus said, “The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, ***man is the tabernacle of God, even temples***; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple.¹⁷” In Revelation, chapter twenty-one, the Lord has revealed that after the final judgment, after there is a new heaven and a new earth, and after all things are put under God’s feet, that God will dwell

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:12-13

¹⁵ 2 Nephi 7:40

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁷ DC 90:5f

with His people. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.¹⁸”

Nonetheless, Jesus Christ has testified continually that “no unclean thing can dwell with God.¹⁹” David wrote, “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee.²⁰” Thus, we must be cleansed of all unrighteousness, even the earth must go through this process. “Therefore, it must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory; for after it hath fill the measure of its creation, it shall be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father.²¹”

In order for us to be a pure and peculiar people that can dwell with God, God sent His Only Begotten Son to be lifted up on the cross and also to rise again that our sins might be washed clean. However, this is not all, Jesus also sent us the Comforter to dwell within us that we might be filled with the pure love of Christ. We can learn how to become a peculiar people who can dwell in the presence of God by reading the following passage from Moroni 8:29:

And **the first-fruits of repentance is baptism**; and baptism cometh by faith, unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth **remission of sins**; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart, **cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost**, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, ***when all the saints shall dwell with God.***

Redemption by the Power of God

In Genesis, chapter fifteen, Abraham had a vision in which God said, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land which shall not be theirs, and shall serve strangers; and they shall be afflicted.²²” For four hundred years the people of Israel were in bondage and “dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm brought he [God] them out of it.²³” Unfortunately, the latter day saints have also suffered themselves to be in bondage in a land that is not theirs, meaning the world, and as the Lord brought His people Israel out of Egypt by power, He has promised that the redemption of Zion must too come by power. Please read the following from the Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 1:3b-e, 64:5b, 100:3d-e, and 108:2a-2c, 4:

1:3b prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, *for the Lord is nigh*; and the anger of the Lord is kindled, and his sword is bathed in heaven, and it shall fall upon the inhabitants of the earth; and the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; **1:3c** and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people; **1:3d** for they have strayed

¹⁸ Revelation 21:3

¹⁹ 1 Nephi 3:35

²⁰ Psalms 5:4

²¹ DC 85:4c

²² Genesis 15:16-17

²³ Acts 13:17

from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant; they seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, **1:3e** but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, **which shall fall**.

64:5b for verily I say, Tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, for I am the Lord of hosts; and **I will not spare any that remaineth in Babylon**. Wherefore, if ye believe me, ye will labor while it is called to day.

108:2a Wherefore prepare ye, prepare ye, O my people; ***sanctify yourselves***; gather ye together, O ye people of my church, upon the land of Zion, all you that have not been commanded to tarry. **108:2b Go ye out from Babylon**. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. Call your solemn assemblies, and speak often one to another. **108:2c** And let every man call upon the name of the Lord; yea, verily I say unto you again, **The time has come** when the voice of the Lord is unto you, **Go ye out of Babylon**; gather ye out from among the nations, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

100:3d Behold, I say unto you, The redemption of Zion must needs come ***by power***; therefore I will raise up unto my people ***a man***, who shall lead them like as Moses led the children of Israel, for ye are the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham; **100:3e** and ye must needs be led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched out arm; and as your fathers were led at the first, ***even so shall the redemption of Zion be***.

108:4a Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour. Let them, therefore, who are among the Gentiles, flee unto Zion. **108:4b** And let them who be of Judah, flee unto Jerusalem, unto the mountains of the Lord's house. Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which ***is spiritual Babylon***. **108:4c** But verily thus saith the Lord, Let not your flight be in haste, but let all things be prepared before you; and he that goeth, ***let him not look back***, lest sudden destruction shall come upon him.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, God has given His everything, even the life of His own Son in order that He might purchase a pure and peculiar people unto Himself. Throughout the Scriptures, we find numerous examples of the exceeding great and precious promises which the Lord will bestow upon His people if we will but follow Him. However, the reception of these promises is determined directly by our obedience to God. "What I, the Lord, have spoken I have spoken, and I excuse not myself...I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.²⁴" Nevertheless, our response to the ultimate example of love and sacrifice which God and Jesus Christ have given should not be solely predicated on the hope of a reward, but rather because we love God and desire to be exclusively His.

²⁴ DC 1:8a and DC 81:3b