

Who are the People of God?

Bulleen: 3/7/2011
Romans 9:14-26

Today we begin a new journey together.

We believe that God has caused us, for a season, to walk, work and pray together for the honour of His name, the blessing of His church and the extension of His kingdom.

As such, it is my hope that, in the coming months, I may be a blessing and encouragement to you all, and that together we may be a blessing to God in our worship and service for Him.

Having said this, I feel certain that many of you will feel genuine sadness as you have farewelled Gary. He is a good man, a good preacher, with a true heart for God, and I am sure, his ministry has made a unique contribution to your lives.

Therefore, I want to say, that I will not be offended if you sometimes inadvertently call me Gary, in fact, I will accept it as a compliment.

As we now begin a new era in the life of this church, I would like us to consider, over the next few months, what it means to be the People of God. As we do this, I invite you to engage and dialogue with me by reading Paul's letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and 1&2 Timothy, to discover what it means to be the **People of God**. You may like to share some of your insights or discoveries with me by writing a note, sending me an email, or we can simply chat together over a cuppa.

Having said this, before we discuss what it means to **BE** the People of God, we first need to identify who **ARE** the people of God.

When we read the Old Testament, the expression itself is first used in Judges 20 to describe the gathering of the 12 tribes of Israel. However, in Exodus 3 we read how God referred to the descendants of Abraham as 'My People'.

It would seem that this special relationship, between God and people, began with God's promise to Abraham. Genesis 17:7-8 says:

I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

*Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; **and I will be their God.**"*

What this tells us is that, to **BE** the People of God is not so much a matter of our choice but God's.

It is a relationship initiated by God, through His self revelation, and involves a response by those who have been chosen or called.

Throughout the history of the Israelite people we read that this relationship with God was challenged and reaffirmed many times, even to the days of John the Baptist. What this means is that God (YHWH - Hebrew) has a special place for the Jewish people, despite the fact that they principally relate with Him through law and tradition.

The question has to be asked however, are the Israelites the only ones to be considered as the People of God?

In Genesis 25:1-17 we read that Abraham had children, other than Isaac, and he lived to be 175 years of age. Vs.9 is of particular interest; *“And his sons Isaac and **Ishmael** buried him in the cave of Machpelah”*

It seems evident that Abraham never lost contact with Ishmael and so an argument can be made that Ishmael and all the other children of Abraham, plus their descendants, could be included in God's invitation to be 'His People'.

The implication of this for us today is the question as to whether the Muslim people should also be considered as inheritors of the promises and blessings of God as **His people**, in the same way as the descendants of Isaac and Jacob.

To answer this we must look more closely at the Muslim beliefs. Now, while we may not agree with, or understand, many of their cultural practices, one thing is clear - their worship of Allah (the Arabic word for God) acknowledges Him as the one true creator God as revealed to Abraham.

What this says to us is that our relationship with God is not the possession of the Christian church today. Throughout human history God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity; and many people have come to know and understand Him in different measure.

Am I saying that I am a universalist and that all roads, all gods and all beliefs, lead to heaven? Decidedly NO! Hindus worship thousands of gods. True Buddhists have no relationship with God at all.

What I am saying is that God alone is the one who calls us to be His People. While there may be many home grown religions and philosophies in the world of men, they have no continuing relationship with, or accountability to the one true creator God.

And then we come to a defining point in human history, around 2000 years ago, when God initiated a new revelation of Himself, in His desire that ALL people on the earth may come to know Him in a special relationship based, not on law and obligation, but on faith and loving devotion.

It is in the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth that a new and closer relationship with God has now been established. In the Lord Jesus, because of what he has accomplished in His death and resurrection, we (who have not been inheritors of the promises to Abraham) have also been invited to be counted among the People of God.

Though we cannot claim to be descendants of Abraham, we too now have this divine invitation, not by any right of our own, but purely through the mercy and grace of God Himself.

As the Lord said to the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah in Ch.30:22, *'You shall be My people, And I will be your God'*, so now in Romans 9:26 He invites us all, *"And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons (and daughter) of the living God."*

This is our promise; this is our joy!
So, who are the People of God today?

They are ALL who are called by Him to live their lives in a daily relationship with Him!

Can one's birth secure us in this relationship?

NO!

Can we earn it with good living or good works? No!

Does our association with institutionalised Judaism, Islam or Christianity guarantee us a place in heaven?

No!

The real questions and answers that matter are found in our ongoing relationship with God that is based on, not what **WE** can do, but on what **HE** has done. It is God's revelation of Himself that has made all the difference.

His self-revelation began with Abraham, then through great people like Moses, Samuel and the prophets, including John the Baptist who was the last of the Old Testament prophets. God's self-revelation has now culminated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

To know the Lord Jesus is to know God.

As Jesus said in John 14:9, "*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*" and in John 12:44-45, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me."

Who are the People of God? Everyone who responds to the revelation of God and chooses to live their lives to honour and glorify HIM.

As we read in Matthew 6:33, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and **HIS** righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*"

May God bless you this week as you seek Him in all your ways.

