

Yahweh appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him, **I have heard your prayer**, and have **chosen** this place to myself for a **house of sacrifice**. If I shut up the sky so that there is **no rain**, or if I command the locust to **devour the land**, or if I send **pestilence** among **my people**; if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now my eyes shall be open, and my ears attentive, to the prayer that is made in this place. For **now have I chosen** and made this house **holy**, that **my name may be there** forever; and **my eyes and my heart** shall be there **perpetually**. (2 Chronicles 7:12-16)

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now my eyes shall be open, and my ears attentive, to the prayer that is made in this place. (2 Chronicles 7:14-15)

Last week we visited the compelling **story of Ruth** and Naomi, one of the most touching love stories in the Bible. **Ruth's stirring appeal** to her mother-in-law to let her become one with her people and her God has aroused admiration for centuries and become the inspiration for many a marriage sermon. But the context of this powerful illustration of love and devotion was not in the context of a marriage but rather had to do with a **growing awareness** that being **one of God's people was better** than anything the world has to offer.

*They lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but **Ruth joined with her**. She said, Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her god: return you after your sister-in-law. Ruth said, "Don't entreat me to leave you, and to return from following after you, for **where you go, I will go**; and where you lodge, I will lodge; **your people shall be my people, and your God my God**;" (Ruth 1:14-16)*

Despite the fact of **Naomi's bitterness** after losing her husband and children in a foreign country that was especially hated by her own people back home, her daughter-in-law still **saw something about her** that exerted a powerful **magnetic draw in her spirit**. Clearly it was not so much Naomi's disposition that **attracted Ruth** to want to radically alter the context of her life and identity, but **it was the God that Ruth came to learn about** and begin to **experience for herself** that drew out her affections and led her to **pursue a new life** despite the depression caused by the recent death of her own husband.

*I will walk among you, and will **be your God, and you will be my people**. I am Yahweh your God, **who brought you forth** out of the land of Egypt, **that you should not be their slaves**; and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and **made you go upright**. (Leviticus 26:12-13)*

The children of **Israel** were the **chosen people** of God as descendants of Abraham who first received the promise directly from God and entered into **covenant** with Him. It is **this covenant** that is being referred to here in this **answer from God to Solomon** related to his prayer of dedication for the temple built for God's honor. When we look at references throughout Scripture where God speaks of those **called 'my people'**, there is very often **linked** with that **another phrase** essential for appreciating the **kind of relationship** God has in mind for His people. This is **not a legal, obedience-dependent** relationship, but rather a **mutual commitment of love and trust** where **God takes the initiative** and invites His people to **perceive their own identity from His perspective**.

*I will walk among you, and will **be your God**, and you will **be my people**.*

God told Moses to **construct a sanctuary** for the main purpose of **giving God more intimate access** to His people so they could better **appreciate** how much He **cared about them** and wanted to **be with them all the time**. God wants to **be with His people**, not just as an object of worship but rather to **make Himself available** to become their complete **origin of identity and worth**.

*Let them make me a sanctuary, **that I may dwell among them**.* (Exodus 25:8)

The **sanctuary** constructed in the wilderness **immediately followed** their dramatic **deliverance** from Egyptian slavery. It was God's purposeful plan to acclimate those He had **chosen to represent Him** in this world, to what **He really felt about them** and longed for them to **reflect in their own lives**. **Worship** is all about **sourcing identity** and how and **where we acquire our sense of worth** and value. **Who we worship** determines what we come to **believe about how to act** like ourselves, for who we **consider to be 'our people'** has enormous influence on **how we respond** in every situation. Thus when God says that someone is 'My people' He is saying they should **give Him first priority** when it comes to how they **perceive themselves** and how to think and feel in all their relationships with others.

*Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat meat. For I didn't speak to your fathers, nor command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but **this thing I commanded** them, saying, **Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people**; and walk you in all the way that I command you, **that it may be well with you**. But **they didn't listen** nor turn their ear, but **walked in their own counsels** and in the **stubbornness** of their evil heart, and **went backward, and not forward**. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet **they didn't listen** to me, nor inclined their ear, but **made their neck stiff**: they did worse than their fathers. You shall speak all these words to them; but **they will not listen** to you: you shall also call to them; but **they will not answer** you. You shall tell them, This is the nation that has not listened to the voice of Yahweh their God, nor received instruction: **truth is perished**, and is cut off from their mouth. (Jeremiah 7:21-28)*

*Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will turn again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have compassion on his dwelling places; and the city shall be built on its own hill, and the palace shall be inhabited after its own manner. Out of them shall proceed **thanksgiving** and the voice of those who **make merry**: and **I will multiply them**, and they shall not be few; **I will also glorify them**, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall **be established** before me; and I will punish all who oppress them. Their prince shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach to me: for **who is he who has had boldness to approach to me?** says Yahweh. **You shall be my people, and I will be your God**. (Jeremiah 30:18-22)*

*Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will **make a new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although **I was a husband to them**, says Yahweh.*

*But **this is the covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: **I will put my law in their inward parts**, and in their heart will I write it; and **I will be their God**, and they shall be my people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Yahweh; for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Yahweh: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

*Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: **I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.** They shall come there, and they shall take away all the detestable things of it and all the abominations of it from there. **I will give them one heart**, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walks after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way on their own heads, says the Lord Yahweh. (Ezekiel 11:17-21)*

I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in the midst of them; and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, says the Lord Yahweh, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:23-28)

Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion; for, behold, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of you,' says Yahweh. Many nations shall join themselves to Yahweh in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you. (Zechariah 2:10-11)

*Thus says Yahweh of Armies: "Behold, **I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.**"* (Zechariah 8:7-8)

Notice how in **all of these references** that it is **God who is taking the initiative**, not the people. God is the one who seeks to **draw people into intimacy** with Him, to allow Him to dwell among and even in them. **God created us for intimacy**, and this intimacy involves **mutual trust, affection, admiration** and learning what it **looks and feels like to act like 'our people.'**

Far from being a **legal relationship** where identity is based on **compliance to rigid expectations** and regulations, what God **longs for us thrive in** is an awareness that **we are loved all the time** regardless of how badly we mess up or how good we may be. We too are **called to be God's people**, and Christ has already done **everything possible to include every human being** in this **saved identity**. Yet the nature of **love requires freedom** for each one to **choose for themselves** whether or not they will **believe what God says about their identity** and choose to **live in a consensual relationship** of intimate **love and trust** as they **consent for His Spirit to transform** them into His likeness.

God's answer to Solomon's prayer **outlines the option** any one of us may **choose** to follow if we are **willing to identify as one of God's people**. God's chosen people are not biological descendants of Israel, but rather those who **accept the reality** that we have already been **chosen and are in Christ**. To **complete this identity transaction** involves simply believing and **embracing this identity as true** rather than any of the false identities we believed about ourselves for too long.

What God says to us here is **not** intended to **instruct us how to become** one of God's people, but rather **what it looks like to come into agreement** with and **synchronize** with God by believing we **already are His child** and have been **freed to reflect His love** by simply **receiving it without resisting** every day. To **learn how to act like ourselves and our people**, we **look to Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith. Don't attempt get God to love us by acting like Jesus. Rather simply **believe God's word** that says we were **chosen before we were even born**.

The reason that anyone **continues to live in dysfunction** and sin is **not** because we **don't try hard enough** to **overcome sin** in our lives, but **because we resist believing and receiving the love** our heavenly Father pours out on us incessantly. Our perceptions have been so **warped by false notions about God's disposition** towards us that we **imagine** all sorts of **dark motives in Him** that are **not real**. God **longs to dwell in us**, both **will and to work** out His good pleasure in our lives. What He asks for is our **consent, our cooperation, our surrender to believe** what He **says about Himself and about us** over believing our **feelings** or our **traditions** of our **perceptions warped by past experiences** that cause us to feel suspicious of Him.

*So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling. For **it is God who works in you** both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. Do all things **without murmurings and disputes**, that you may **become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish** in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world, holding up the word of life; that I may have something to boast in the day of Christ, that I didn't run in vain nor labor in vain.*
(Philippians 2:12-16)

Working out our own salvation has nothing to do with working hard to **become** a child of God or to **affect God's disposition** or **gain His acceptance** of us. Paul says in the very next verse who empowers this work – **it is God who works** in you. So what is he saying to us as children of God? To **work out our salvation**, our **healing**, our restoration to **reflect God's image** as human beings. We are to consent and **keep consenting** to allow God's Spirit to work in and through us so that **His attractiveness** and kindness and compassion **may be seen through our lives** in the midst of chaos, confusion, violence and darkness that surrounds us on all sides. What **God needs is permission**, consent so that **in our weakness His power** may be made perfectly manifested to **attract others** to want to know Him too.

Behold, how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! For this cause the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)