

# Becoming God's People V: A Strange Sight

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*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests **and a holy nation**. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. – Exodus 19:4-6*

## **A Kingdom in the Making**

God's plans for Israel were about to start taking shape. They had been released from Egypt, seen their enemies eliminated in ways they could not have imagined, and saw God do miracle after miracle to prove His ability to care for His people. He stopped them in the middle of the journey to reveal his heart and his plan for them, and to show them who they were to be. Being a nation and possessing the Promised Land was what they were all about, and seeing things unfold gave them hope that their days of suffering were finally at an end.

For many of the Israelites, this was the fulfillment of all the stories they had heard about God, and the promise of Abraham that they had held onto for so long. Many years later a similar scene played out with Jesus and the disciples:

*After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore **the kingdom to Israel?**" – Acts 1:3-5*

The disciples were listening to what Jesus was saying, and saw that he actually had the power to do what he said, especially after he rose from the dead. Like Israel, the disciples saw the fulfillment of what they had longed for – the end of their days of suffering, and the beginning of a kingdom where they were the focus. The disciples saw a nation ruling that was not part of the promise, and could not wait for a king to step up and make things right. For us, we have desires and images of what life is supposed to be – who we are supposed to be and what we should accomplish and when. It is when those things do not happen that we "look for a king" to make those things right – for the restoration of *our* kingdom. While God does indeed want to bring restoration to us, it is rarely just to bring our suffering to an end. God's purposes are much greater, and he gives us opportunity to partner with him in revealing his heart to the world.

## To and Through

*Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, **what good thing** must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself." "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, **and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.**" When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. – Matthew 19:16-22*

When the disciples were speaking with Jesus, they were looking for him to do something for them. They wanted the kingdom to be restored *to* Israel. The young man that approached Jesus was also looking for something to be done *to* him. He wanted a connection between the works he did and entry into eternal life. The man by anyone's standards was living a holy life – following the commandments, being respectful, etc. The man however was under the impression that the blessing of God could be obtained simply by doing good deeds. He held a works-based view of holiness, that God would accept him for an act that he did. Jesus called him to a deeper understanding, not just of himself, but of God and his heart. Had the man yielded his heart, he would have received not only the riches that come from the kingdom of heaven, but the ability to allow his blessing to *flow through* him to others. The man missed out on the opportunity to experience the fullness of what holiness really is.

The disciples knew that Israel was supposed to be a holy nation, but at the time they were a colonized people under Rome. All aspects of their life, even including worship, were governed by Rome, a nation that prided itself on the other gods they followed. When Jesus rose from the dead, he seemed poised to be able to establish that holy nation that Israel was to be. What the disciples did not see was that Jesus had a deeper revelation, a deeper fulfillment and a deeper calling for them – a kingdom that was not a kingdom of "*to*" but rather a kingdom of "*through*":

*He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, **and you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." – Acts 1:7-8*

For Jesus, holiness was not an end to itself, but it was a means to many ends. Holiness was not only to affect the life of the one submitted to it, but through that submitted life, others would be touched and be able to experience that same blessing of holiness.

## Holiness Defined

The Hebrew word for holy in the phrase “*holy nation*” is qadowsh (קָדוֹשׁ).

Qadowsh means holy, sacred, and *set apart*. In fact, the root word for qadowsh (קָדַשׁ qadash) primarily means *set apart, dedicated, consecrated, prepared, and in some instances, to be honored*. When God, then, was saying he would make Israel into a holy nation, he was not specifically talking about making a nation that simply did not do bad things, or a nation that shunned evil. God was making them into a nation that was *set apart*. God wanted to make a nation that was different.

*When the day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day. But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.” – 1 Samuel 8:19-20*

Israel had watched God work in them, but when Samuel could no longer lead, and his sons were not great leaders, the true heart of the people came out: “give us a king, so we can be like everyone else”. Israel wanted identity based on what they saw around them. They didn’t want to be set apart, they wanted to blend in. This was because they were focused on themselves. They were willing to take what God was doing for them, but not as a sign of his love, *because they still did not see themselves as a nation*. In their mind, until they looked like everyone else, they were not to be measured with them, and were therefore not worth being considered. We can also think that we do not have value or are not worth being considered because we don’t meet an external standard or have not achieved things that others have. The strength of our voice is tied to the stuff of our life: the less we can show the less our voice matters.

*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore as it is written, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” – 1 Corinthians 1:26-31*

Paul dealt with a people who wanted to fit in with the successful, with the intellectual and thought that to be considered, they had to fit a standard. He told them that God did not call them because of what they brought to the table – that he did not consider them because they were so much better than the world. In fact, it was just the opposite – they were different from the world, and God would use them to shame and dishonor that which is in the world.

## Why Be Normal?

Where Israel had been previously cast aside, not valued and not considered, God chose Israel and put focus on them. The question we can ask ourselves is, why?

*For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. **Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.** – Deuteronomy 7:7-9*

Just like with Paul, God revealed that his calling of Israel was not because of what they were able to bring to the table. They were not a great nation with lots of people – they were the small nation that had been in captivity for years. However, God chose them because he loved them, and out of that love *for* Israel God **declares and demonstrates** that love to the world.

## An Abnormal Life

*One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “**Have you considered** my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” – Job 1:6-8*

Job was successful according to the world’s standards, but that was not what caught God’s attention. God was drawn to Job’s heart. When Satan came before God, he gave the indication that he was looking for people to destroy. “Have you *considered* my servant Job?” God was indicating that Job was different. The word “considered” in Hebrew, *suwm* (שׁוּמ), means to set, to found, to appoint. This is very similar to the meaning God used when he declared Israel a holy nation. God was basically saying, “have you set apart Job, because I have”. Job was considered by God, and never ceased to be considered by Him, even when everything was gone. In fact, it was at the point that Job, by our standards, needed validating the most that God used him to pray for his friends.

It was the difference of Job that God used. It was the difference of Paul, who came to Corinth in weak appearance but strong faith. It was the difference of Israel who carried the promise God made to Abraham. In all of this, God considered those who the world would cast away, and used them to show his heart. Peter, speaking to people who have been persecuted and scattered says:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, 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. – I Peter 2:9-10*

For Peter, the castaways of the world were considered in God, and they would be used to show God's heart and love.

### A Strange Sight

Moses had seen a lot of things. Born Hebrew but growing up in Pharaoh's place, then running for his life and tending sheep for 40 years. One day he noticed a bush on fire. That would not be enough to catch anyone's attention. What did catch his eye was the fact that the flames seemed to have no effect on the bush. The flames and the bush were perfectly fine coexisting.

*So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up." – Exodus 3:3*

This was truly a different type of sight. What was supposed to happen did not. When Moses saw how different it was, *he was drawn*. When our lives are different *and we are coexisting with the Spirit of God*, people are drawn to what they see. At the right time God showed Moses the truth about the tree, and he gives us opportunity to do the same with those that are drawn to us.

### Introspection:

- What suffering are you waiting for God to bring to an end? Are you interpreting his love and intentions based on that being fulfilled?
- How would you describe the life and character of *your* kingdom? Where does God fit in your kingdom?
- What good things make you feel like you are closer to God? What is he calling you to that would make you sad to do?
- What does God want to do through you? Who, specifically does God want to touch through you?
- What are people drawn to in you? How do you transfer that to the Lord?

### Call to Action

- Ask someone in the congregation how they see God coexisting with you. Spend time with the Lord thanking him for that area of your life
- Ask God for one area outside of yourself that you can be used to show his love.