

## Title: “Holy”

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Deuteronomy 7:6

7/30/2023

**Service Readings:** Deut. 7:6–9; Rom. 8:28–39; Matt. 13:44–52

*We are a holy people, set aside for service to God. What does that mean in today’s world?*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you have ever doubted, even for one single moment in your life, who you are and from where you find your identity, this morning’s Old Testament passage is for you. Moses wrote these words to the nation of Israel before they were to finally enter into the Promised Land. They had attempted this forty years before but their disobedience to God led to their failure. But now, the nation set aside by God was about to enter a land set aside, as well. And as they prepared for this monumental immigration, Moses wanted to remind them, once again, who they were and from where they found their identity. And although this happened thousands of years ago, his message is just as valuable to us, even though it is received in a different context.

We have not been wandering in the dessert for 40 years, nor are we preparing to enter a land that is foreign to us. We are not facing enemies that are much larger, much stronger, and much more loved by the world.

Let me reconsider that thought. Over at least the past generation, it sure seems like this country is wandering, doesn’t it? Truth claims established never once questioned now are placed on trial by society. And so often these truths are dismissed as outdated, irrelevant for today’s society, and even at odds with the new, so called truths that have moved into their place. We have lost a common direction that we once all seemed to share and now we wander around individually, each forging our own path to a destination we determine on our own. And this land that we live in? We may not be on the outside looking in, but it sure does seem that way these days. We might call ourselves Americans but sometimes it doesn’t seem like we can relate to our fellow citizens. We watch as they make decisions that are contrary to God, watch as they destroy each other, watch as they place their own wants and desires ahead of their neighbors and all we can do is just stand there and wonder what kind of country we live in. Is this *really* what we want to lay claim to? And enemies? We have no shortage of these, either. We can look to politics and see them standing against us just as we can look to society in general and see that it is adverse to what we proclaim.

So, maybe we can relate to the Israelites, after all. And maybe with this perspective we can listen to this passage again, for it seems that Moses is speaking to us as well.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup>But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

We are a people chosen by God, not because of our own desires but because of his. We were redeemed, not because of our own efforts, but because of his. We were not forgotten, even when we sinned, not because of our own covenant but because of his. It's all there and it is just as true today as it was when Moses spoke it.

But this morning I would like to focus on just the first sentence:

<sup>6</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.

For me, this is where it becomes very personal and where I lay claim to the location of your identity. You are a people holy to the Lord your God. This is what Moses wrote and it is the word holy that is the key to understanding the richness of this claim. For you see, the word holy means to be set aside for a sacred purpose. It means to be separated from the regular, to be reserved for something extremely special. In the books that Moses wrote, we find examples of this very concept in the building of God's temple and the furnishings that were contained within. Bowls, candles, altars, so many things were designated as holy by God and that meant that they could be used for nothing other than to the service to Him. And how did they acquire this status? It was not by the work of the priests but by the work of God. He is the one that set them aside and made them holy. He is the one that separated them out of the common to be dedicated for his holy use. This is what it means to be holy. It is a designation by God, a *reservation* even, to be devoted for service to him and him alone.

But this designation, this action by God doesn't end with his temple and instruments. It extends throughout time, even into today. Today we stand holy, set aside. We were called by him into a baptism with Jesus. And with his Word we were pulled out of the common and to the holy. We were adopted into his family as sons and daughters. We were called by name and consecrated for service to him. It is not by our calling but by his.

How beautiful and secure a message! To know that we were not the ones to make ourselves holy but that he did it to us. And he continues to keep us separated, keep us holy, not because of our service towards him, and even in spite of our disobedience towards him. Even though we continue to sin, he continues to make us holy and use us as instruments for his work.

And so, here we stand, made holy. We have been separated from the whole of society and formed into one church body. We have been made holy by the blood of Jesus that he shed for us on the cross and are now able to do what we were set aside for; we are to serve God. And we are to do so just like the Israelites were supposed to – in a world surrounded by sin, surrounded by enemies. We have been set aside to be the light to these people – to attract them to us so that they, too can be included in this holy body of Christ.

And the world is in desperate need of this message. The harvest is plentiful. We live in a world where identity is defined by the individual instead of God. Where people set themselves apart from the common but for their own good. We see this happening, and we've seen this happening for many years. But recently it seems like it is at a breaking point. I'm not talking politically, I'm talking personally. People have been sold a message that their identity is dependent upon their own definitions. They have been told that subscribing to this belief will enrich their lives. They have been told that it is better to be a

slave to their own god than it is to be a slave to him. But they are finding out that all this brings is despair; all this brings is pain; all this brings is isolation and loneliness. All this brings is a people wandering in a dessert, but without the guidance of God.

So we need to wander into that dessert in search of them, for they are confused, saddened, and burdened with the reality that the lies they were told were devastating for their lives. We need to bring the message of Jesus. We need to bring them to the baptismal font where they too can become holy, set aside. Where they too can find identity and meaning through the only one who can provide it. And so I encourage you to be intentional about seeking these lost and speaking to them in love. Build relationships with them, even if it means setting aside your own opinions. Bring them to Jesus and let God change their hearts instead of you. Will you do that?

Please pray with me.

We live in a world full of people searching for truth, searching for identity. We come before you today to stir in us the motivation to seek and find them and then bring them into knowledge of you. We pray that you soften their hearts that they would be receptive to this message and that you would set them aside as holy for your work.

Amen.