

Rejoice and Reflect your Status!

“A good girl I am!” Eliza screamed. Have you ever seen the famous musical, “My Fair Lady”? If not, I encourage you to watch it or to go see at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School in two weeks. It has great music and comedy and insight to human nature. It will put you in a good mood. The story is set in England about 100 years ago. Eliza Doolittle (even her name insults her) has a lowly status. She lives on the streets and has a dirty face. Her clothes are rags. She wipes her nose on her sleeve and has a terrible accent. The other main character is Professor Higgins who has a high status as an upper-class English snob. He meets Eliza and offers to turn her into an upper-class lady. She agrees hoping that she’ll be able to have a better life. She moves into Professor Higgins mansion and his servants give her a bath, get her new clothes and start to reform her. Eliza feels insulted and complains, “A good girl I am! What did I do wrong?”

The early Christians in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) must have felt like complaining just like Eliza. They were really being persecuted for their faith. They could be hauled into court and ordered to say, “Caesar is Lord.” Instead, they would say, “Christ is Lord.” And for that, they could get thrown into prison for disloyalty to the government. Their money and house could be taken from them. The ancient Romans would put Christians in the Colosseum and laugh to watch hungry lions attack and kill them. Many were crucified like Jesus was. Others were covered with tar and set on fire. The Christians must have been wondering, “We’re good people. What did we do wrong to deserve this?”

Persecution of Christians looks different today in America. Last week, a lawmaker in Nebraska proposed to ban children from attending church youth groups or Vacation Bible schools because churches are, “Religious indoctrination camps.”¹ Also last week, a police officer in Georgia was forced to resign because he posted on his personal Facebook page his belief that marriage is for one man and one woman.² When Christians repeat what the Bible says about marriage and sexuality and other moral issues, we are often called unloving or bigoted or hateful. Jesus told us that it would not be easy to be a Christian. We want to complain, “We’re good people. What did we do wrong?” The status of Christians in our culture is getting pretty low.

We want to protest, “A good person I am.” But then the devil stirs up our conscience to yell at us, “You are not good! You are sinful scum!” We must confess that we are sinners. Think of the times you used God’s name to swear falsely, or the times you looked at websites that were not pure, or the times you got drunk, or the times you told dirty jokes, or the times you did not love and honor your spouse, or the times you yelled in anger, or the times you failed as a parent or grandparent, not to mention the greed and gossip that happens so naturally. It’s easy to point fingers at the sinners in our society, but we realize that we are just as guilty. According to God’s standards, we are sinful scum. We are not perfect and that nags at us. It’s easy to feel gloomy and depressed. The devil is quick to pile on the guilt so that we feel that our status before God is worthless.

It was very tempting for the early Christians in Asia Minor to wonder what good it did to hang on to Jesus. It just caused them suffering. We also are tempted to wonder, “What good does it do to believe in Jesus or go to church? My neighbors don’t care about God at all and they are happy and enjoying life.” Instead of standing up for the morality that God outlined for humans in the 10 Commandments, it would be much easier just to go along with the immorality in our world. Maybe we would not “give up” on Jesus, but we could hide our faith and just let others do what they want to do. That way people would not think bad things about us and we can have a good status in society. We are always so concerned about what other people think of us.

The Apostle Peter realized that those early Christians were in serious danger. They felt like street scum and were starting to loosen their grip on Jesus. Peter needed to remind them of their real status as a Christian. He needed to remind them that there is much more to life than the things we can see around us. There is a spiritual reality that we can not see with our eyes. That’s what Peter was referring to when he called us (:11), “**foreigners and exiles.**” This is not our permanent home. You can not see faith. Yet, faith in the heart gives you the status of a child of God. Peter needed to remind those early Christians about their true spiritual status.

Peter practically explodes with excitement as he overflows with power-packed words to describe their true spiritual status (:9), “**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.**” Let’s unpack this verse a bit as we rejoice in our status. The people of the world might not think too much of you or treat you so nice, but you ARE (not could be, or should be, or might be, or hope to be, but ARE) a...

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/anti-religious-bigostry-nebraska-dems-bill-would-ban-kids-vacation-bible-school-church-youth-group>

² <https://www.wjcl.com/article/jacob-kersey-gay-marriage-georgia-officer/42718641>

- Chosen people – before God created the world, he looked into the future and fell in love with you. He chose you to live with him in his kingdom forever. Other people in this world may not like you or treat you nice, but God chose you, as an individual, to live with him forever in heaven. When you chose something at a store to buy, you have to pay for it. When God chose you, he knew it would cost the life-blood of his perfect and precious Son. Only Jesus Christ could take away our sins, but God was willing to sacrifice Jesus so that he could claim you as his own. You are worth dying for. You have a very high status in God’s sight.
- A royal priesthood – Just like the Old Testament priests would announce to the people that their sins were forgiven and praise God, you can tell people about salvation. As you sing and pray here in worship, you are serving as priests of God. You are also royalty, a prince or princess in God’s kingdom. You have a room reserved for you in heaven.
- A holy nation – Through faith, your sins are taken away. Regardless of how many sins you have committed, or how bad your sins were, or how much your sins hurt someone else, they are ALL gone. Everyone of them was washed away by Jesus’ blood. And in exchange, Jesus gave you his holiness. In God’s sight you are perfect and pure, noble, good, decent, dignified. It’s just as if you never sinned. You have the status of a saint, a holy person.
- God’s special possession – Whichever team wins the Super Bowl is going to hold up the Lombardi trophy and show the world what they won. God is excited to point to you as his special possession. God loves you.

Peter continues bubbling over in verse 10, “**10Once 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.**” Before God brought you to faith, you were like homeless people, struggling and desperate for spiritual help, but now you are citizens of God’s kingdom and God’s shows you mercy and provides all your needs here and eternally.

This is music to our souls that makes us sing. The unbelievers around us are quick to insult us and make fun of us, treat us like we have a very low status. But St. Peter holds God’s mirror in front of you so that you can see how beautiful and blessed you are. **Rejoice in your status** as God’s beloved people. Spoiler alert, Eliza Doolittle transforms into a beautiful and elegant woman. People are convinced that she is a princess. It’s the classic Cinderella story from rags to riches. Everyone loves a good Cinderella story—the story of someone of ordinary background who experiences a thrilling change in life. The small college basketball team that wins the big tournament. The farm girl whose singing voice is discovered on a national talent show. The penniless, single mom who writes the phenomenal, best-selling book. All these stories are child’s play, however, in comparison to the story of what

Jesus Christ has done for you and me. Do not get discouraged and do not loosen your grip on Jesus. Rejoice in your status.

God changed your status from a sorry sinner headed to hell to a saved saint headed for heaven. Our changed status also changes our attitude toward God and his Word. We don’t see the commandments as old-fashioned burdens, but as godly guidelines for a blessed life. We know that the 10 Commandments. (Can you list them?) are for our good and we want to “give back” to God for saving us. We’re not going to see what we can get away with before we cross the line into sin. St. Peter reminded us that sinful desires (:11), **“wage war against your soul.”** Avoid sin like the plague. It’s deadly. We are going to be careful that our words are polite and pure, not dirty. We are going to strive to live such good lives that, just by looking at us, people can tell that we are Christians. We will strive to help others and honor God.

God did not make you make you a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his special possession just so that he could put you in his trophy case and say, “Look what I made.” God also brought you to faith because he has a plan for you. No matter how lowly or useless you feel to society, God gave meaning and purpose to your life. The fact that you are still alive on this earth means that God still has work for you to do. No matter what stage of life you are at, you can (:9), **“declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** You are to (:12), **“live such good lives among the pagans (unbelievers) that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God.”** Just like a light shines in the darkness, your lives on this earth will be lights shining in a sin darkened world.

Do not be afraid or ashamed to let people know that you are a Christian. Maybe wear a cross neckless, or a shirt or tie or hat that lets people know that you belong to Jesus. Pray for opportunities and think of some ways that you can get the message of Jesus and his saving love to others. As we conclude our worship, the usher carries the light from the altar out during our last hymn as a reminder that we are now going to carry Christ to a sin-darkened world. We came into this world with a lowly status as sinners. God in his grace has given you the status of saints. Rejoice in your status and reflect it in your daily lives. Amen