

Citizens of God's Holy Nation

"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." 1 Peter 2:9

Before God gave me the blessing of being a stay-at-home mom, he provided for me through a career working with immigrants. Many had escaped oppressive and corrupt governments. They eagerly anticipated the day they would become naturalized citizens of the United States. This lengthy process includes waiting a required number of years, learning English and civics, passing a citizenship test, and, finally, pledging loyalty to the United States in an emotional naturalization ceremony.

Those of us who were born in the United States became citizens automatically. We did not need to go through a naturalization process. Yet, spiritually, all of us who follow Jesus Christ are naturalized citizens of God's holy nation.

We did not automatically become citizens of God's nation by our births. The reality is that we were born into a kingdom darker and more evil than even the worst earthly government. We were born under a ruler more cruel and tyrannical than even the most terrible earthly despot. What is more, we had no hope of ever being able to escape that dark kingdom and live as free men and women. The Bible tells us that we were slaves to sin (Romans 6:6), living under Satan's control (1 John 5:19), and powerless to do anything about it (Romans 5:6).

We needed someone to break the devil's power and rescue us from sin. We needed a way to escape from Satan's evil kingdom and gain entrance into God's holy nation. For that reason, God sent Jesus to earth. He came to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8) and set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18). He accomplished his mission by living a perfect, sinless life in our place, and dying to pay the penalty for our sins. His resurrection from the dead then proved that he had crushed Satan's power. The Holy Spirit has called each of us personally out of slavery in Satan's kingdom of darkness. In our baptisms, God has given us a new status as full-fledged citizens of his own kingdom of perfect light.

This holy nation is comprised of you and me and all other believers from every corner of the globe. We are all holy because Jesus' blood has cleansed us of sin, and the perfection of his life of obedience has been credited to us. We are all holy because God has set us apart from the rest of the world to serve him alone.

The naturalized U.S. citizens I came to know through my work simply bubbled over with gratitude. They were eager to tell me what this country had given them and why it was the greatest nation on earth. Their love for the U.S. shone not only in their words, but also in their work, their friendships, in short, in every aspect of their lives.

Our new lives as citizens of God's holy nation are filled with opportunities to declare his praises. The Greek word translated "praises" in 1 Peter 2:9 literally means "excellent virtues" or "excellent works." Witnessing with our words is one important way that we declare God's excellent works and virtues. But we also declare his praises in *everything* we do. First Corinthians 10:31 says that our eating, our drinking, and whatever we do may be done to God's glory. We declare his praises when we "tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD," (Psalm 78:4) by having home devotions or by inviting neighborhood families to Vacation Bible School. We declare his praises when we show patience with our cranky children. We declare his praises when we show respect for a difficult boss. Every circumstance becomes an opportunity to give evidence of God's excellent virtues and works.

Naturalized citizens of the United States know that a great privilege has been conferred upon them. We as naturalized citizens of a much greater nation recognize the tremendous gift that God has conferred upon us. He rescued us from slavery in Satan's evil kingdom. He cleansed us of sin through Jesus' blood. He made us full-fledged citizens of his holy nation. He gives us opportunities to serve him, not as slaves, but as free women and men. In every role, every relationship, and every situation, let us declare the praises of our amazing God.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the wonderful privilege and honor of belonging to your holy nation of believers. Forgive me for the times I have failed to appreciate this gift. Enable me to take full advantage of all the opportunities you give me to declare your praises. In the name of my Savior, Jesus, Amen.

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