

God's Precious People

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[0 : 00] Well, we're back into our study, and I want to thank Roger Crian for teaching in these last two weeks. As you were learning on communication, we're back this morning to our study of the precious things of God.

And the next precious thing is God's precious people. The saints are precious. Now, Winslow uses a rather different launching off text, and I'm not going to ask you to turn to it, but it's Lamentations chapter 4.

In the first two verses, Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonians. They have surrounded the city such that it's cut off all of their incoming and opportunity for food.

And so people are starving to death inside, piling up their corpses in the streets. And here's the word of Lamentations 4, 1 and 2.

How the gold has lost its luster. The fine gold become dull. The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street. How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands.

[1 : 16] The precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold. Now, that's God's estimation of his people.

That's not the world's estimation. The world does not regard God's people as precious. I was in the car recently, and the radio happened to be on Rush Limbaugh.

I heard him for the first time in 10 to 15 years. And he was explaining the liberal press's view of evangelical Christians. And that's what perked up my ears.

What's the press's view of us? Well, I'm sure it doesn't surprise you to know they don't think we're worth our weight in gold.

They're not using words like precious to describe us, the precious sons of Zion. In fact, many think that our world and our nation would be better off without us.

[2 : 20] Winslow says, The world holds the church of God very cheap. We're not gold in the estimation of the ungodly. And yet the world owes its existence to the church.

Why does the world keep on going? Because of the church. Because of her presence here and God's plan for her. And when the last son, precious son of Zion, is added to the church, this world will be over with.

She owes her existence to the church. We are the light in this world's darkness. We are the salt in this world's rot and moral corruption. We're the wheat in the midst of the chaff.

We are those living self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. And that's the gold of any nation. For righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

And so untold blessings come to the world because of the presence and the prayers of God's people. And even though they don't know it, this world is far better off because of God's precious people living among them.

[3 : 32] Now, of course, we're not surprised to know that the world does not esteem the children of God as precious. All we need to do is remember what they did to our Savior, the perfect God-man.

As they despised and rejected him when he lived among them. He who was precious to God, despised and rejected by men.

Nailed to a cross of shame as one not worthy to live. And he says to us, his disciples, his followers, if they have hated me, they will hate you.

So it's critical that as we live in the world, we don't let the world shape our identity. We don't listen to the world so much that we're letting the world's view of us become our view of us.

We must ever remember God's valuation of us as precious sons of Zion. Now, judging from how often God tells us this in the scriptures, this is important.

[4 : 40] That we're to have God's view of us as precious to be an important part of our self-identity, of how we think of ourselves day by day.

Armed with this, we can say, let the world deride our pity. You see, I will glory in this, that God considers me as precious in his sight. Well, think then with me this morning, how precious God's people are to him.

First of all, they're precious to God the Father. And that's seen in his sovereign choice that made them his precious people. How is it that we became the precious people of God?

Well, from eternity past, God chose us to be his precious ones. Ephesians 1, 4, he chose us in Christ, before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless.

Not chosen because we were holy and blameless, but chosen to be his holy and blameless people. 1 Peter 2, 9, you are a chosen people.

[5 : 50] Now, that's said of us, the New Testament people. But that relationship as the chosen people of God was foretold in God's choosing a nation in the Old Testament.

It was like a shadow of God's people, chosen people in the New. And so God chose a nation, the nation of Israel, the type of his chosen people.

And in Deuteronomy 7, in verse 6, Moses tells Israel, 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, to be his treasured possession, his precious, his inheritance, his treasure.

He chose you not because you were such treasures, but we were chosen to be, to become his treasures.

[7 : 01] In fact, it was his choice that made us his treasures. So it's not our own inherent value that makes us such precious treasure in his sight.

It's rather his choice of us that makes us his precious treasure. The fact is, we were not always precious, were we? We are told that all have turned away.

We have together become worthless. And yet it was when we were worthless that he counted us as his precious ones and chose us to be his own treasured possession. So our preciousness to him can be seen in what he gave to purchase us.

Romans 8.32 says, He did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. Winslow says, The gift of his beloved son demonstrates God's estimate of our preciousness.

He's not spent so much on any other creatures to make them his. Malachi 3.17 They will be mine, says the Lord Almighty, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.

[8 :14] Now, what someone is willing to pay for an item is no proof of its inherent value. Great Britain's former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rarely went anywhere without her simple, rectangular, black leather handbag.

Maybe you've seen pictures of her with that black leather handbag. Well, that bag recently sold at auction for \$35,000. It was expected to draw four times that amount for some reason.

But that someone would pay that amount does not mean that the person itself is worth that much. I suppose you could get a lot of black leather handbags for \$35,000.

Rather, what it does... So it doesn't tell you the inherent value and worth of that purse.

What it does tell you is how precious the buyer counted that purse. That he was willing to pay \$35,000 to have it as his own.

[9 :17] So that God purchased you with the precious blood of his spotless son is no proof of how valuable you are in and of yourself. But it is proof of how valuable and precious he considers you.

We sing how deep the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure that he would give his only son to make a wretch his treasure.

You see, we are his precious treasure. Wretches made his precious treasure. And he gave his son to purchase us.

So that's the first point in how God the Father counts us as precious. Then we come to the fact that we are equally precious to God the Son.

His, too, is an infinite love that surpasses knowledge. And his love made him willing to become man. That he might become sin for us.

[10 :22] That he might become a curse for us. And suffer and die in our place. And spill his precious blood. If only we might be saved and belong to him.

And then he rose again for us. And he ascended into heaven for us. Where he is now reigning for us. And is preparing a place for us. And is coming back for us.

That we might be with him forever. Winslow says there's no other object upon earth that so engages the thoughts or fills the heart of Jesus. Like his people. You're precious to him.

You're the apple of his eye. Winslow again. Oh, how precious to him. The tear of godly sorrow. The touch of trembling faith. The look of lowly love.

The offering of sincere gratitude. The longing of holy desire. So precious to him are they. His ear is attentive to their faintest cry. His thoughts are never withdrawn from them for a moment.

[11 :25] His hand is ever extended to help. So we sense that preciousness of God's people to the son of God. To the Lord Jesus.

Remember his high priestly prayer in John 17 before his death. He says to his father. I want those you have given me to be with me where I am.

I want them with me. Where I am. That's love for a precious people. So the preciousness of God's people to Christ.

Can also be read in what he's preparing for them. An eternal inheritance. Reserved in heaven for them. That never perishes. Spoils or fade. And it will be as precious to him to see us enjoying heaven.

As it will be precious for us to be there. Enjoying it. Read his heart towards you. And all that he's preparing for you. There are these many proofs of your preciousness to Christ.

[12 : 27] Winslow drives it home in application. Oh believer live not without a deep constant realization of your preciousness to Christ. All your present holiness, happiness and encouragement.

Spring from your believing apprehension of this fact. That you are precious to the heart of Jesus. Let your faith grasp it amidst the very changes of your Christian course.

Be assured of your place in his affections. And no act of obedience, of love or of service on your part will be too costly. Your love to him will be the reflection of his love to you.

Proportioned in its degree and intensity to the vividness with which his love is seen and realized. So again I say it's important that our sense of who we are as God's people be tied to his view of us.

It's especially so as we live in a world that hates us. Now thirdly, we're equally precious to God the Holy Spirit. He's come and made us his temples where he lives.

[13 : 36] He's made us his home. His dwelling place. I live in a high and holy place but also with him who is contrite and lowly in heart. Winslow says the work of the Spirit is as essential to our salvation as the finished work of Jesus.

Because the Spirit applies to our hearts the work that Jesus accomplished. He gives us new birth into God's family and then lives inside us to carry on his sanctifying work in us.

Producing his holy fruit within. Winslow says with jealous love he guards each blood ransomed, grace won, and heaven kept soul night and day.

The Spirit keeping the precious blood-bought children of God. So you see, there's the preciousness of God's people to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Now what's true of God's people collectively is true of his people individually. Each one is infinitely precious to God.

[14 : 47] I think sometimes we might say, okay, yes, the church is precious to Jesus, but that somehow doesn't filter down to me personally. And Winslow is pressing us on this point.

What's true of the whole is true of the parts. So you, as an individual Christian, need to live with this sense of being precious to God.

Winslow again, it cost him as much love, as much power, as much grace, as much glory to save one sinner as to save the whole elect church.

Who then can decide how dear you are to the Father? We would say, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. So Winslow wants us to see that we are precious in his sight.

He then draws application for us from this truth. How can your life ever be the same when you realize that your person, your love, your obedience, your service, your offerings, your worship, are precious to him beyond telling?

[15 : 53] How precious to him is the obedience of his people as the proof of our love to him who says, if you love me, keep my commandments. The Lord delights in the obedience of his people.

He loves it above any other evidence of love. For he says to us, to obey is better than sacrifice. It is the most rare and costly thing you can lay on God's altar.

Your obedience. One divine law obeyed. One lowly cross taken up. One cherished sin laid down for Christ's sake. Is more precious to God than you'll ever know.

So there's the application to us, you see. If we are this precious, then let us live like his precious ones. And please him who counts us so precious.

Your suffering the will of God is as precious to him as doing the will of God. As there is a will of God to suffer as well as a will of God to do. And when you sweetly submit to his yoke and what it is that he's called you to endure, that is precious to him.

[17:02] It's full of love and trust and a desire for his honor. So recognize your preciousness to Christ.

Now I want to turn you to another text. Not something that Winslow chose, but Psalm 16.

It doesn't actually have the word precious, but the concept could not be any more present than it is in Psalm 16. Notice how the preciousness of God's people to himself is stated.

Psalm 16 and verse 3. As for the saints who are in the land, they're the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. Now, all you have to do is jump down to the end of this chapter and you see that many of these verses are messianic in character.

In other words, they're statements of and about the Lord Jesus Christ. You will not leave my... How does he put it at the end of...

[18:17] You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Acts 2. Peter applies that to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so there's much here that really could be said to refer to the Lord Jesus and indeed, I think, could be the very words of Jesus.

And I think that is true of verse 3. That we should think of the Lord Jesus as saying, As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

We've just seen that, the preciousness of Christ's people to the Lord Jesus. But as true as that is, these are also the words of David as the psalm reminds us.

And there is an application to David as well, I believe, in this verse. That it's David who's saying, As for the saints who are in the land, they are the precious ones in whom is all my delight.

And as such, we should be able to confess the same preciousness about the people of God. Now who is David talking about when he speaks of the saints?

[19:34] Not the New Orleans football team. Not those in the Roman Catholic Church who are super-Christians, who have distinguished themselves by some extraordinary service or miraculous deal.

The saints. No, no. The Bible refers to all the people of God as saints, doesn't it? That's found in the book of Psalms here and elsewhere, but it's also found 45 times in the New Testament where the people of God are called saints.

And never does it refer to some elite class of Christians, but always it's just another name for the ordinary Christian. The average, run-of-the-mill Christian.

Even below-average Christians. Remember those immature believers in Corinth that needed a lot of sanctifying work? When Paul writes to them, he lumps them together with all the saints.

Calls them saints. That's often Paul's greeting. To the saints in Ephesus. To the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. Saints are believers.

[20:50] Now the word saint comes from that word sanctify. The idea is to set apart as holy. These are the people who have been set apart from the world.

Here's the whole mass of mankind. And out of these, God has chosen a people for himself. They are saints. They are set apart to himself. Set apart.

And so what we are, holy, set apart ones, is to affect what we do. How we live. Often the Bible is calling us to be what we are.

To act in line with our calling. You're called saints? No. Live like saints. That's the message of so many of the epistles.

Now notice what it is. So we know who the saints are then in this passage. They're all, they're the people of God. Notice what David says about the saints. They're the glorious ones.

[21:48] In whom is all my delight. Two things stated. First, they're the glorious ones. The excellent ones. The noble, wonderful, magnificent ones. It's quite high language for the people of God, isn't it?

And then he says, they're the ones in whom is all my delight. In other words, they're precious to me. They're delightful to me. And he's not saying someday in heaven they will be precious to me.

But right now, they are precious to me. You've heard that ditty. To dwell above with saints we love. Oh, that will be glory.

But to dwell below with saints we know, well, that's a different story. But here you notice it's not saints above that David is talking about.

He's talking about saints below. Still dwelling in the land. They still got their feet on this earth. They're still not perfectly glorified.

[22:57] They're still struggling with sin and falling and getting up and repenting. And they're the ones called saints. And they're still sinners who still need to receive God's grace and mercy and show it to others.

They still sin and need to confess their sin. And yet even so, these yet imperfect saints in the land are the very ones that David says are the glorious ones in whom is all his delight.

Precious. Precious. Precious. So, we've moved then.

If the saints are precious to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then they surely ought to be precious to us as well. Shouldn't they? Charles Haddon Spurgeon gives four questions for the preacher to consider from this text.

And I want to put them to you. He doesn't develop them in his treatment on the Psalms at the end of dealing with the Psalm.

[24:00] He's got these words for poor pastors who don't have many books to read. And so, he's just wanting to help give them suggestions on how to preach the chapter, the Psalm.

And so, that's what he's doing here. He's giving hints to the country preacher who's maybe all he's got is his Bible and Spurgeon there. And so, Spurgeon says, well, try this in developing a sermon from this text.

Four questions. Number one, why should all Christians be precious to us? And I think these would be good for you to think on further and develop yourself. But why should all Christians be precious to us?

And so, as I thought about that, I thought, well, because of all the important things that we have in common. Our same spiritual pedigree. We're all born of God.

We have the same Heavenly Father. The same brothers and sisters in this same family. The same elder brother, Jesus Christ. And he delights in all his brothers. So, we should too.

[25:06] And then, we have the same new nature. Because in the new birth, we've all taken off the old self and have put on the new self. And it's the same new self that's being created after the image of its creator.

We are being renewed into the same likeness of Christ. The same new nature. Being transformed into the same likeness from one stage of glory to another.

2 Corinthians 3.18 So, God is determined to have every one of his children look exactly like the Lord Jesus. Romans 8.29 He's predestined that that's going to happen.

And we're all going to look just like him. Moral likeness to Christ. And he's working all things together to accomplish that in his people.

And don't you love to see the family resemblance in the family of God? Don't you love to see the likeness to Jesus in the people of God? To deal with people who bear the marks of Christ.

[26:14] It is God that makes them so delightful. It's a new nature beautified with the fruit of the Spirit. People who have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

People adorned with the graces of Jesus. After a week in the world, isn't it refreshing? A breath of fresh air to fellowship with the people of God.

The saints. The glorious ones. Who are like their Lord. And growing more like him each year. Who love like him. Are gracious like him. Patient and kind and concerned like him.

Who are zealous for good works like him. Precious saints of God. In such a world. What's it worth to have some of these.

To fellowship with along the way. It ought to make for another reason. The Lord's day is precious to us as we gather. Why should all Christians be precious to us?

[27:17] We have the same spiritual pedigree. We have the same new nature. But thirdly, we have the same enemies and battles to share with one another. And to pray with one another about.

These are people who understand us. Who know what you're talking about when you talk about your felt weakness. And the power of the flesh within.

That when you would do good, you find that evil is present with you. You don't come to this body. And have them look at you with dumb stares.

That's saying, well, we don't know what you're talking about. The world looks at you that way. But not the people of God. We all are fighting the same spiritual warfare. We understand. Because we too are battling the same flesh.

The same world. The same devil. But we have the same hope. The same power in Christ. The same encouragements. And so that makes the saints precious. And lastly, because we have the same destiny.

[28:19] We're going to share in the same inheritance. Isn't that true of the children in a family? I mean, unless you write them out of your will for some reason. Usually they share the same inheritance, don't they?

And our father doesn't do that with any of his children. And we're going to share in a new heaven and a new earth. We're going to live together forever.

And I would not be surprised to find that in heaven God will arrange our mansions such that our next door neighbors will be those Christians that we have the hardest time with on earth.

What do you think? You say, that'd be purgatory. No, it wouldn't. Because it will be a perfect you and a perfect them.

Heaven is a world of perfect love. We're part of the same blood-bought family of God heading to the same promised land to enjoy the same Savior in God, the same everlasting joys, to sing the praises of Jesus in the same eternal choir, to work side by side in a new earth.

[29:36] Well, there's at least four reasons, and maybe you can draw out more. Why the saints should be precious to us. That's the first question. Why should all the saints, everyone, be precious to you?

Well, Spurgeon's second question is, why then are Christians no more precious to us? If they should be this, and we have all this, why is it that Christians are no more precious to us?

Why is it that we don't delight in them more than we do? Why is it that it's all too true that to dwell below with saints we know? Well, that is a different story. Well, it's simply because the likeness to Jesus has not yet been perfected.

In them or in us. And therein is the rub, isn't it? There's the challenge to this counting the saints to be the precious ones in all the earth.

And so there's reasons in them, and there's reasons in us. And you can develop that further. The third question, why are we no more precious to them?

[30 : 44] So the second question was, why are they no more precious to us than they are? But now Spurgeon turns the mirror on us, doesn't he? And he says, well, why is it that you're no more precious to them?

And then again, we have to say, well, there's imperfections in them, but also in us. And so that ought to cause us to ask, is there something in me that makes it hard for others to consider me precious?

And then his fourth question, how can we make our fellowship more precious and delightful? So he doesn't want to just leave us there with why aren't we, but how can we grow more and more to where we say, you know, as for the saints who are in the land, they are really my people.

They're precious to me. My delight is in them. That's where I belong. That's where I find all these things that I have in common.

So don't let the differences you have keep you from fellowshipping around the things you hold in common. That's one thing that we can do. How can we make our fellowship more sweet and more precious?

[32 : 02] Well, God has a great big family. And they're not all Reformed Baptists.

In fact, only a small fraction of his family are. Well, they too are the glorious ones in whom is all our delight.

Do they love and trust the same Savior? They're the brethren. They're brothers and sisters. Then love them too. Enjoy fellowship with them too.

They could be your neighbors in heaven. Grow in serving your brothers and sisters. Grow in praying with them and for them. Take interest in others. Invest in them. Get together.

Talk about the things that you share in common in the Lord Jesus. That's true of us as a body here. But we're trying to remember that we belong to the big body of Christ as well.

[33 : 04] And remember that they're precious to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And if precious to God, then I count them precious as well.

If he makes much of them, I should too. So I think of the positive things about them. I don't fixate on all their negative points.

I mean, if you all fixated on my negative points and I fixated on all your negative points, we wouldn't count each other precious. And so we need to see the likeness to Jesus in each other.

We're going to see this in the book of Acts. And Barnabas saw the grace of God in these people and it made him glad. I trust that as we get together, and the more we get together, the more we'll see of each other's differences, won't we?

But I trust that won't have the last word, the big word. I trust that the more we get together, the more we will appreciate. I see something of Christ there in him, in her.

[34 : 10] I see something of the family resemblance. And that that would make us glad. And make us count them the precious ones. To give thanks for them.

You know, when we're giving thanks, isn't that something how Paul does that with all these believers? I wonder if that could have some effect in how we consider the saints.

That if we're giving thanks for one another, it forces us to, off of the negative, there's a time to rebuke and correct. I'm not denying that. You've heard that plenty from this podium.

But I'm talking, there's a lot of other things. And when you see the grace of God in your brothers and sisters, that should cause you to give thanks. And if you make it a practice to pray for your brothers and sisters with thanksgiving, as Paul did, well, you see, you're forced.

But what can I thank God for in this brother, that brother, this sister? And it causes you to see something of the preciousness of Christ in them.

[35 : 16] Much to thank God for. So those are four questions that Spurgeon would add to Winslow and seek to drive us, by way of application, this thought that God counts us as precious.

Suck on that as a sweet piece of candy in your mouth. Take in something of that every day to live upon his view of you as precious in his sight.

And then for you to extend that to your brothers and sisters and to count them precious. And so may the Lord work it in our day of fellowship and worship together.

Well, it's a spiritual grace, so let's pray for it, shall we? Thank you, our Father in heaven, for all the times in your word that you've told us how precious we are to you.

We confess, Lord, that our own view of ourselves and the devil's accusations against us and the world's hatred often bear the upper hand and we get to thinking of ourselves in much different terms.

[36 : 28] And we even start questioning whether we're really precious to you. Forgive us, Lord, for doubting your unfailing love. Help us to measure your love to us in that sacrifice that you gave for us, in your words that you have spoken to us, in the heaven that you are preparing for us.

And may we be so grasped and gripped by your love for us that we would then count all of your people as precious.

We thank you for each other. I thank you for my brothers and sisters here. I thank you that you have begun the good work in them and that there is much of Christ that is being made evident in their lives.

Thank you for that work of grace. And thank you that you promise to continue it until you come for us. And then thank you that you're going to perfect us and make us all perfect.

Perfect in love. Then let these perspectives weigh in more heavily as we make our way through this world. We're blessed, Lord, to have this day together.

[37 : 48] Thank you for the Sabbath, the day of rest and worship for your people. Thank you for the anticipation we have of gathering and meeting with you and singing your praises together now, no longer alone and no longer in our homes, but now to gather together and to fellowship with one another, to encourage one another, to build one another up.

Make it so, Lord. Add your blessing to your word wherever it is sown today, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.