

1973 THE BAHAMAS FIRST INDEPENDENCE SERMON 1973

This sermon was preached at the Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service sponsored by the Bahamas Christian Council on the occasion of the Celebration of Independence of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. The service was held under the clear blue skies on Clifford Park in Nassau, New Providence, The Bahamas, at 9:30am on Sunday, the 8th of July 1973.

The scorching Sunday morning sun beat down on the thousands who attended the great gathering. Prince Charles, Governor Sir John Paul and Lady Paul. Governor General designate Sir Milo Butler and Lady Butler, the Prime Minister and Mrs. Lynden O. Pindling, members of the Christian Council and the national choir were seated on the platform facing the newly erected, flag-decked pavilion where visiting dignitaries, guests and members of Government sat in the shade.

Dr. Cooper had pastored and served faithfully The Mission Baptist Church, Hay Street., Nassau, Bahamas from 1940 – 1980



“A Chosen Generation, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, A Peculiar People”

1Peter 2:9

**Preached by
Dr. R. E. Cooper, Sr.
B,Th., D.D., JP., M.B.E.**

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE FIRST
INDEPENDENCE SERMON:
"THE GREAT MOMENT OF CELEBRATION"

By R. E. Cooper Jr.

PROLEGOMENA:

In an Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service sponsored by The Bahamas Christian Council on the Celebration of the Independence of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Bahamian people were able to experience the liberating and transforming presence and power of God in their aspirations to become free. This service was held at Clifford Park in Nassau, N. P., Bahamas at 9:30 A.M. on Sunday, July 8, 1973.

The scorching Sunday morning sun beat down on the thousands who attended the great gathering. Prince Charles; Governor, Sir John Paul and Lady Paul; Governor-General designate, Sir Milo Butler and Lady Butler; Prime Minister Lynden O. Pindling and Mrs. Pindling; members of the Bahamas Christian Council and the national choir were seated on the platform facing the newly-erected, flag-decked pavilion where visiting dignitaries, guests and other members of Government sat. Bahamians from all corners of The Commonwealth along with visitors from around the world constituted the audience.

Alas, providence had it that the speaker for the occasion would be none other than one of the pivotal fighters for liberation and human rights, in the person of Dr. R. E. Cooper Sr. At that time he was serving in dual capacities as president of The Bahamas Christian Council, and The Bahamas National Baptist Convention.

Dr. Cooper, taking his text from the Epistle of Peter, Chapter two and verse nine declared that God wanted us to become a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people.

According to Dr. Frank Moore of Gaines United Methodist Church of Cincinnati, Ohio, Dr. Cooper's Sermon "embodies the effectiveness of the power of preaching that grips the soul, which transforms the personality to help a people to liberate themselves from a dominant power to live out a sense of independence."

As the preacher of the Independence Proclamation, Dr. Cooper brought much experience to the platform for the prophetic hour at hand. He knew that preaching was a vital concern as far as man was concerned. And, of course, the Bible was his handbook. The independence proclamation is fully depended upon the inspiration and authoritativeness of the Bible as the Word of God. In a profound manner, Dr. Cooper knew that the Bible contains the revelation of God's will for this budding nation; that it contains instructions which alone furnish the basis of wise and worthy conduct both for individuals and nations. And that all men should avail themselves of every possible opportunity to acquaint themselves with its teachings, and that all Christians should be faithful and even aggressive in their efforts to teach its truth.

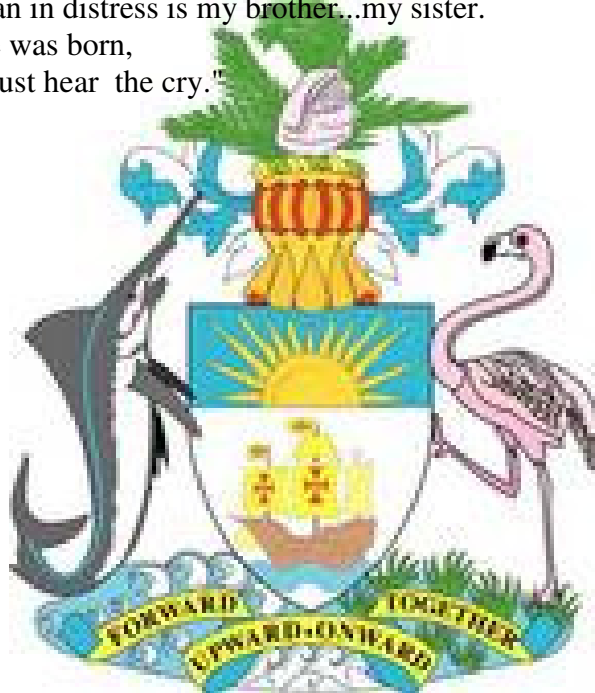
From a cursory glance of his sermon, immediately noticeable are the words, "...chosen ...royal ...holy ...peculiar ...," which portray Dr. Cooper's very high esteem for his people and his complete confidence that "independence through God will work." These words from the Word of God were an inspiration of hope for a people who had just been "called...out of darkness into God's marvellous light." Dr. Cooper wished, at that moment and forever, that Bahamians everywhere would drink the freedom they had hungered and thirst feverishly for such a very long time.

In retrospect, Dr. Cooper, from a forty-year vantage-point, had unparalleled foresight which he manifested in his admonition to the Bahamian people, through the apostle Peter: "...be sober and walk worthy of your high calling....be Holy...be careful of your manner of life..." The food upon which the Christians are to be fed must be the sincere milk of the Word - the Holy Scriptures.

All who knew Dr. Cooper would concur that the core of his proclamation epitomized the very foundation of his theological convictions in keeping with the foundation of God's principles for humanity. There is no doubt that Dr. Cooper believed in the brotherhood of man as his message openly states:

"...the man in distress is my brother...my sister.

Irrespective of where he was born,
I must hear the cry."



NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER ECUMENICAL SERVICE PROCLAMATION

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

"For ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an Holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The Christian Church is not a new product on the market. In the very beginning of his Epistle, the apostle, Peter, admonishes them to be sober and to walk worthy of their high calling as obedient children. He further urges them to be Holy because their Father in Heaven is Holy. He states very clearly that the people called Christians should be careful of their manner of life because the same God who loves them and has called them unto holiness will one day judge them according to their works. The food upon which the Christians are to be fed must be the sincere milk of the word - the Holy Scriptures.

Having drawn their attention to these, the apostle reminds them that their salvation, their liberation from the shackles of sin, was not obtained by material substances such as silver and gold but with the precious blood of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

So now, since the Christians have obtained such a Holy estate, they must be prepared to lay aside the evils which would hinder them from growing into the full stature of Jesus Christ. The apostle names some of the unwanted elements in the life of the Christians that would obstruct their onward reach in spiritual growth - guile, hypocrisy, envies, evil speaking. For it is only when these things are removed from our lives, that we can truly become spiritual material for God to make us become what we ought to be. And what does God want us to become? A chosen generation! God, who in the past chose Israel to be His chosen generation through Abraham, is now, through Jesus Christ, choosing the believer to become His chosen generation through salvation and sanctification. Here, the desire for unity is at once expressed.

In the New Testament, He is known as the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ through whom we become sons of God. One Father. And that is why we cry "Our Father." Note that our position in the Kingdom is an act of God's sovereign mercy and grace; for the very night before His death, Jesus said to His disciples: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

So then as members of this one generation, this royal priesthood, this Holy nation, this peculiar people, we must have a common concern for, and an interest in human needs. The cry of our brothers and sisters from across the Commonwealth and the World indeed, should reach our ears and find in us a readiness to listen with bowels of mercy and a heart of compassion, for we are one generation. No longer is the man by the side of the road a

Gentile or a Jew, and the passerby a Levite or a Samaritan. But the man in distress is my brother. She is my sister. Irrespective of where he was born, we are one generation. I must hear the cry. I must attend to his wounds. I must lift him up - try to help him get on his feet again.

If life is worthwhile living, it ought to be lived at its best. We should be constantly engaged in the business of lifting man, lifting his physical body out of the squalor and poverty of want and all that go with it. We should help him, and put him in a place where he can enjoy some of the good things which this same God, this same Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ has put into the world, lifting his mental capacity where he can discover and solve his own problems by reaching conclusions which he will not forget. Lifting his spiritual horizon towards the rising Son and here I mean, the Son of Righteousness who rose with healing in His wings and hear Him say, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light."

We should gird ourselves with honesty, sobriety and singleness of purpose. We should find ourselves sitting with peasants and not being humiliated or downhearted and standing before kings and not being afraid. It is then and only then that can we walk with dignity "Forward, Upward, and Onward" together remembering that as members of this holy nation, this peculiar people, we are all human beings.

So then, as members of this royal priesthood, we must have a concern, concern for and an interest in human rights. God has caused us to see that Christians in their acts who deny the dignity of their fellowmen, also deny Jesus Christ in spite of all that they may profess to believe. Therefore, we Christians want to safeguard human rights in a just Bahamian community. The very nature of our convictions causes us to be concerned about the dignity and freedom of men everywhere. Men created by God in His image and His likeness.

We must also be concerned for the equality of individuals who make up our community regardless of race or origin. So then, we must pay particular attention to the development of human rights and the right of self-determination. Churches should strive to make their congregation feel and know that in the world of today, the rights of the individual are woven together with the struggles for a better standard of living for the underprivileged. Because of the age in which we live, a world glaring with inequality and social injustice, a deep change in human attitude is required. Christians and Christian Churches should take the lead, set an example for respect, dignity, equality and the free expression of thought, even in prison.

The active engagement of people of all ages in development, reconciliation and social work is to be encouraged and supported as an expression of our solidarity as a nation. We are happy and pleased to know that these fundamental rights and freedoms are entrenched in the new Constitution of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. This goes down as a strong testimony of the integrity and intention of the Government. May the good Lord help us so to do.

And now, why did God do all of this for us? Why has He so lavishly put upon us His blessing? The answer is right here in the text, “that we should show forth the praises - the praises of Him, who called us out of darkness, into His marvelous light.”

Why did God give us all that sea out there, the sand and the balmy air and all of the blooming flowers, the green grass and all we can see with our eyes this morning? Why did He give it to us? He has given us these blessings. He had brought us to this day to be a blessing.

I was happy to hear His Royal Highness yesterday, in his address, state that he has come to present instruments which would give us complete freedom.

Why did God do all of this for us? The apostle said God has done this, so that we, as a people in this Commonwealth, may be an example to others. For, when you hold God's hand, when you let God take control of the situation, when you turn over all matters to God - whether economic, political, social or religious - whatever it is, God, resort to God, not man. God has brought us on Clifford Park today! And above our heads, His sun shines in marvelous splendor and we fear nothing!

The Holy Spirit is here this morning, He is in control. God has given all this so that the Bahamian people will kneel at the Cross. Stay there. Tell God all about it. The leaders of this country should know that above their heads, there is a God somewhere. A God who hears! A God who answers prayer! All they have to do is to trouble the cross. Tell it to Jesus. We have no fear today. We are not intimidated. For, the Christians walk on solid ground.

On Christ the Solid Rock The Bahamas stands. And, hear me today, all other ground is bogging sand!

Thank God today that God has called us. And as I close this message, today, we can hear the voice of God reaching down from heaven and see Him looking on the crowd and saying:

Today, this is a chosen generation, this is a royal priesthood, this is a holy nation, this is a peculiar people. I have called them to be my own. That they should show forth my praises and be an example to all the world to show that Independence through God will work!

