

A Proclaiming Community

September 2nd, 2012

1 Peter 2:9-12

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

This text addresses two massive, weighty, urgent questions of life: who are you, and why are you here? Monkeys, dogs, giraffes, don't lose sleep over these kinds of questions. This is a uniquely human issue, and we all live and structure and plan our lives out of our answers to those questions, even though it's often not a conscious thing that we experience. You don't schedule into your weekly planner, "Wednesday afternoon from 3-4 I'm going to spend some time journaling about who I am and why I am here." Nevertheless, you live out of some sense of the answer to these two questions.

Verse 9 provides the answer for these questions, and that's what I'd like for us to consider today (briefly, because there are some other people I'd like you to hear from today).

Who are You?

So, who are you? *"⁹But you (this is to Christians. Christians, this is who you are. And if you're not, His invitation to you is to become one, and experience what you were made for) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...."* There's much to say here (especially in explaining these individual terms, which are rich with meaning and application), but for the sake of brevity allow me to draw your attention to three important truths.

1. You are a people

Notice that all four of these identity statements are corporate: a chosen *race*, a royal *priesthood*, a holy *nation*, a *people* for His own possession. So to understand who you are at the deepest level is not just about you as an individual. We *are* individuals; you are uniquely made by God and loved by God. But you were made to be a part of a people (hence the placement of this message/text in a series on church membership). So let's put away the individualistic notion of, "I'm good with Jesus, but I want nothing to do with His people." That's a denial of who you are! Christ did not die to create isolated worshipping individuals. He died (and rose) to create a people, the church.

2. You are a people who are part of a bigger story

I say this because this description points back to God's words to the people of Israel right after He delivered them from slavery in Egypt: "5Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." But Israel did not keep His covenant, and now these words are applied to all believers -- both Jew and Gentile -- who make up the church, His (New) Covenant people.

Your identity doesn't begin and end with you. Knowing who you are isn't mainly about "finding yourself." It's about submitting to the story you are a part of. You are a part of something bigger than you, something that existed long before you and will outlast you. Your life is not your own; the story of your life isn't mainly yours to write, because it's not *your* story; it's *His* story.

3. You are a pitifully precious people

You are "a people of His own possession", and as we just saw in Exodus 19, a part of His *treasured* possession. The Maker of the universe speaks over you: "4You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you..." When God thinks about you, He feels rich. "5As the

bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." He doesn't merely tolerate you; He's wildly passionate about you: "¹⁷The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

But be careful here. Don't let this get to your head. You are *pitiably* precious to Him. I use that word not to be a downer, but because of verse 10: "¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy (been pitied), but now you have received mercy (been pitied)." You were in darkness (v.9), the darkness of substituting the worship of Him for created things, and thinking you could do a better job of ruling your life than the One who gave you life and breath and everything.

But now, through sovereign grace, the God who gives life to the dead and who calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom. 4:17) has raised you from the dead, opened your blind eyes, so that you see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. He did this through Christ's life, death and resurrection. So, yes, you *are* precious; but you're precious in such a way as to call attention ultimately to His preciousness, not yours: "⁴May those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!" (not, *I* am great!).

Why are You Here?

Which leads directly to the second key question: what are you here for? "⁹But *you are* a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that* (here's your purpose statement) you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Why are you here? To proclaim the excellencies of this great God! Because all around you, in your neighborhoods and schools and workplaces and grocery stores and fitness clubs, people don't know Him! And He's determined from eternity where and when

you should live, that through you people might come to know and love and worship and serve this great God of ours.

It's such a simple mission: tell people about what is beautiful. There are a lot of people who think "evangelism" is bigoted and narrow-minded and intolerant. But in living out this reason for existing, all we're doing is what everybody does: talk about what we love. We all do that. If I spend a few hours with you, it won't take me long to find out what you love, because it's what you'll most naturally be talking about. We Christians are dead people walking; we are blind people seeing. Shall we keep silent about that?

How Do We Do This?

So God has given you new life in Jesus Christ -- He's called you out of darkness, opened your eyes to His beauty and made you His possession -- that you might devote your life to making Him known. Now if this coming week, this coming school year, the rest of your days, are for the purpose of declaring the excellencies of God, maybe we need some practical guidance on how to go about doing this. What does this look like? How does it work? Do you have to be a preacher like me? Peter tells us in the following verses:

"¹¹Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

Michael Green is the author of a book called *Evangelism in the Early Church*. He illustrates what Peter is saying. The first Christians were aliens; they were holy, set apart. Their integrity, generosity, hospitality, sympathy, handling of adversity, chastity and pursuit of equity were so peculiar that it made unbelievers stand up and take notice. How do you live with this courage? With this integrity? With

this compassion? With this generosity. They were not of the world, but they were not detached from the world.

And as they lived this distinctively attractive life in front of an unbelieving world, they opened their mouths and proclaimed Christ as their hope: "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." And thus their good works didn't bring *them* glory, but brought *God* glory. It's not about being a preacher; it's about living your life in such a way that demands a gospel explanation, and then lifting up Jesus as that explanation.

That is how the early church grew; and that is our covenant commitment in supporting the testimony of the church: to live a life among the Gentiles -- in coffee shops and in neighborhoods and play grounds and kids' dance recitals and workplaces -- that can't be understood apart from Jesus Christ. This will take many different shapes and forms, and I want you to hear from some people in this Body who take their calling as Christ's ambassadors seriously, so they can tell you about what that has looked like for them.