

His People. His Possession. His Proclamation.

1 Peter 2:9-10

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We are in the thick of March Madness. John Wooden won a staggering ten national championships including seven in a row. It wasn't too hard to fill out your bracket when Wooden was coaching. Over one stretch they won 88 consecutive games only to suffer their first loss while visiting the great state of Indiana and playing which university team?

Wooden was famous for Woodenisms, little quotes of life wisdom. *"Winning takes talent; to repeat takes character."* *"It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."* I wish we could hear Wooden in the locker room before a game or during a huddle with 10 seconds left to play. He had an ability to say the essence of the matter in a memorable and inspiring way.

I love it when the Bible says things like that, where just one verse says it all—the big picture, bottom line type statements in Scripture. There's John 3:16 for the gospel. Colossians 1:18 for Jesus. And for the church, it's 1 Peter 2:9. Here is Peter, a member of Jesus' inner circle, the leader of the apostles and the leader of the early church, giving his halftime exhortation. It is a bottom line for the church purpose statement. Why does the church exist? Why are we here?

"But 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." (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)

I think if you were to ask the exiles Peter wrote to, *what was your favorite verse in Peter's letter?* They would say, *I like that out of darkness into marvelous light verse.* Indeed in very pastoral language, Peter pours on the encouragement by telling them who they really are. Not how they may see themselves. Not how the culture around them may see them. But who they really are in the eyes of God.

As fellow Christians, all these apply to us as well. Peter is describing us. Christian, he is describing you. The verse is easily organized around our identity and our calling. Who we are. What we are to do. Both are critical. I can't help but notice every basketball team in the tourney wears shirts emblazoned with the name of their university on the front. Who are we? We're Duke. We're Kentucky. We're the team about to lose to Kentucky. Everybody knows who they are. Christians, who are we?

A People for His Possession

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession..." (1 Peter 2:9)

One thing true of every human being is that we need an identity. We need to know who we are and who we belong to. This is where our family, or hometown, or school we attended provides a certain level of belonging. I think this is part of the appeal of sports teams. Watch a Manchester United soccer game or an Alabama football game or a NASCAR race. We sometimes laugh at people's devotion to a sports team but it's real. People are in search of belonging to something or somebody.

All of this is about relationship. Human beings must have relationship and we crave relationship with someone or something greater than ourselves. In a sense, we are all that 7th grade boy in the cafeteria looking for a table to sit at. We want to belong. We want to be accepted.

Where do you belong? What would those who know you say is your identity group? Perhaps an easy way to find out is to ask your family what they would write in your obituary. *He was all about this*. It can be almost anything. I see this at funerals where they adorn the casket with the things the individual cared about—a picture of their dog; a Harley hat. Our identities are the things that we look to that make us feel our lives matter.

The curse for humans is that all the identities we come up with are temporary and so disappointing. Right Cubs fans? In the end, even the most meaningful—family and marriage—we don't get to keep. Death separates us from our identities and our belongings.

If only there was something to belong to that time and death won't take away from us. Something to rejoice in more than your favorite team winning the championship every year. Better than the joy of your child being successful or the contentment of a satisfying marriage. Peter essentially quotes Exodus 19 and lists four blessed and enduring identities that every Christian enjoys.

A Chosen Race

"But you are a chosen race." We hear *chosen* and we think that says something about our worth. *God chose us*. This was part of Israel's stumbling. They thought God chose Abraham and them because of them. They thought it said something about them. *"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you."* (Deuteronomy 7:7–8) God's choosing of Israel didn't say anything about Israel, it said everything about God. He loved them because he loved them. God set his love upon them because it is God's nature to love.

Peter says to us in the New Covenant, we are God's chosen people, elected before the foundation of the world. This doesn't say anything more about our worth or lovability than it did Israel's. It says everything about God's amazing love that chose to love sinners and save us. He created a new people group. The result is that we are a chosen people.

A Royal Priesthood

Priests in Israel were allowed to draw near to God. They ministered in the holy place. They had access to God. We are a royal priesthood. We are not royalty, but like priests who are allowed near to the King. We are allowed near to God, to offer spiritual sacrifices "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." We are the King's priests and he bids us near.

Holy Nation

"Just as believers are a new spiritual race and a new spiritual priesthood, so they are a new spiritual nation which is based now neither on ethnic identity nor geographical boundaries but rather on allegiance to their heavenly King, Jesus Christ, who is truly King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16)." (Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 111.)

Don't miss the radical nature of this. This nation of God has no ethnic distinction. Jew. Gentile. Asian. Caucasian. Latino. Black. All are welcome into this new nation. We don't immigrate. We don't need to apply to get in. Citizenship is completely by faith and allegiance to Jesus as Savior and Lord. We are faith citizens of a holy nation.

God's Possession

"A people for his own possession." (1 Peter 2:9)

This word "possession" refers to a practice of the ancient Kings of the East. They would keep a special treasure box or chest of gold that was separate from the official funds of state or the royal treasury. This gold was not for roads or swords or ships but for their own use. This was their personal treasure. Their personal possession.

Peter says we are to God a people of personal possession; a personal treasure to God. We belong to him. He loves us.

- *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."* (Isaiah 43:1)
- *"(Jesus)...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."* (Titus 2:14)

We were bought with a price. God paid it. Jesus' blood paid the ransom. Now we belong to him legally and spiritually.

Take these as a whole. Chosen and holy nation. Priests of the King. Prized by God himself. Think of what this would have meant for these exiles. They felt like men without a country. They didn't belong anywhere. They had lost all their worldly identities. They had lost their geographical identity. Family identities. They are far from everything familiar.

Peter encourages them to realize their true and exalted status; and us as well. We are not who our feelings say we are. We are not who our circumstances say we are. We are not who our pain and trials say we are. Who are we? We are God's chosen and prized possession. A people of his own. We belong to Almighty God and he has made us citizens of the only nation that will endure time, the chosen nation of God.

How important it is that we refuse to make our earthly identities our ultimate identities. Why? All of them disappear.

- Make your identity husband or wife, then death or divorce comes.
- Make your identity your children, then their rebellion shatters you.
- Make your money your identity, then a recession destroys you.
- Make your health or looks your identity, and the creeping signs of age will depress you.

All our earthly identities are fleeting and we are always that 7th grade boy in the cafeteria. Where can I sit? Where can I belong? Who cares for me? God shouts to his people, *I do! Come near as priest. Sit at my table as citizen. Sit near me as beloved son or daughter. Know you are my treasure and you will be forever.*

A People for His Proclamation

"...That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

We are God's possession whose purpose is God's proclamation. We don't exist for ourselves. Notice we are not proclaiming our excellence. We are not praising ourselves. We are not about ourselves. The church exists for the glory of God. We proclaim him! We proclaim how wonderful he is. Indeed, we proclaim what God has done for us taking us "out of darkness" and into "his marvelous light."

Darkness is often used in Scripture to illustrate the spiritual condition of man apart from God. On our own. Doing our own natural thing. We are in spiritual and moral darkness.

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." (John 3:19-20)

There are many other verses like this. Our spiritual darkness is really spiritual blindness. The sun is shining. The truth is all around us. God's nature is evident in the things that are seen (Romans 1:18-19). Our problem is that we are blind. We live in darkness. We can't see this glorious and wonderful light. As someone once said, "We are like a blind man looking in a dark room for a black cat that isn't there." All our vanity and pride and worldly values keep us locked in our blindness. It's all we've known. It feels right to us.

But then something happens. Like scales falling off of our eyes, God calls us out of darkness and into a whole new kind of seeing. We see the light of God's glory through the life and work of Jesus Christ. As we apprehend the gospel, we believe and receive God's salvation through faith in Jesus. This salvation is like a blind man seeing for the very first time. We once were in darkness but now by the power of the call of God through the gospel, he welcomes us into the very light and glory of God. *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (2 Corinthians 4:6)

The same God who made light out of darkness at creation, shines the light of the gospel into our understanding and we see Jesus for who he really is. We surrender our lives in faith. In that moment, we step into his marvelous light.

Purpose!

"That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you." (1 Peter 2:9)

Here is our purpose statement. This is our primary purpose. To proclaim the glory or light of God to a world that is still in darkness.

Look at the word "excellencies." The scholars admit this is a hard word to translate but they go with praises and goodness or excellencies.

How do we proclaim the goodness of God? There's a helpful clue in the chapter. Do you see verse 3? *"If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good"* (emphasis added). That's the same word as in verse 9. In verse 3 we have tasted the goodness of God in saving us. In verse 9 we are declaring the goodness of God. In verse 3 we taste it. In verse 9 we tell it.

We do this all the time with anything we enjoy, especially things we taste. I was recently on vacation with my family. I had a free lunch and happened into a restaurant called Zoe's Kitchen. I had never been to one. I just needed food. It was a nice setting. They advertised all fresh ingredients. I ordered a chicken shish kebob with a side of grilled vegetables and fruit. I didn't know what to expect so when the meal came, I started eating. The first bite was like, *Wow!* All the other bites were the same. The veggies were delicious and the fruit had that mid-summer fresh taste. You know what I thought? "I need to open one of these in Northwest Indiana." This is fantastic! I went home raving about my lunch. I talked about it for like three days. It was that good! I tasted goodness. I declared goodness.

That's what we do with anything we delight in. What a great game! What a beautiful sunset! What an amazing vacation! What a great restaurant! Praise is the overflow of delight. It's as natural to humans as breathing.

"The world rings with praise — lovers praising their mistresses [Romeo praising Juliet and vice versa], readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game — praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars.... Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?".... I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation." (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, pp. 93–97, emphasis mine)

There is the key. Peter can say over and over, declare the goodness of God. Declare his excellency! Declare. Declare. Declare. But the key is Delight. Delight. Delight. If to us, the light is marvelous, then we simply do with it what we do with anything we delight in. We declare it. We share it. We encourage others to go to the restaurant, taste and see that the Lord is good. Delight in his grace and kindness to you. Then share it.

Lest you think this is about street corner preaching or obnoxious forms of evangelism, look ahead to Peter's evangelism guide: Submission to human authority in 2:13-25. Believing wives faithfully living out the gospel in the intimacy of marriage as a means to evangelizing unbelieving husbands in 3:1-6. Faithfully enduring unjust suffering for Jesus' sake in 3:8ff. We declare the goodness of God by faithful and obedient presence and witness to the light in a world shrouded in spiritual darkness.

How do we do this? We know who we are. We are God's treasure. We sit at his table. We bask in the marvelous light of his goodness and grace confident of our identity with him.

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