

A famous preacher visited a nursing home that had some patients with Alzheimer's in it. He went around and greeted the people who were very glad to see him. He walked up to one lady and asked, "Do you know who I am?" and she said, "No dear, but if you go to the front desk, they can tell you."

We have been in **1 Peter** for several weeks now, and as I looked back at what we have covered thus far – I was reminded of the many Old Testament images used by Peter to describe our identity as believers in Christ.

Just like the Jews who left Egypt from bondage to begin their new life, we are to leave our old way of life in bondage to sin. The Jews left Egypt with the hope of a Promised Land, and we are born-again to a living hope and a promised heavenly inheritance. The Jews wandered in the desert for 40 years without a home, the church is wandering in a land that is not their own. This world is not our home – we are just strangers who are passing through. Just like the Jews were to be a holy people, set apart from the pagan nations that surrounded them, we are to be a holy people – different from the rest of the world. The Jews are God's chosen people, and Peter tells us that we are God's chosen as well – we know this because God took the initiative and saved us by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The Jews had a holy temple built of stones, and as the church, we are living stones which make up the holy temple. In the Jewish temple, only special men could serve as priests, only a select few had access to God, but in the church, all believers are priests who have direct access to God. The Jews had priests – but we are priests.

These are the Old Testament images used by Peter to speak about New Testament truths, and this morning we are going to continue to look at these truths about our identity in Christ – who we really are and how we are to live as a result.

Now, before we go to our passage in **1 Peter**, turn with me to the other end of your Bible to **Exodus 19:3-6**. In this passage, just before God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses and to the people of Israel, we are told the following.

³ And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "This is what you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. ⁵ Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

In this passage from **Exodus**, we are told the Israelites had witnessed for themselves the mighty hand of God that protected them from the Egyptians. God brought them to Himself, and if they would keep His covenant, God would elevate them above the other nations of the world. They would exist as God's own possession and enjoy His presence, and they would stand out as a special people, a unique people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation – they would be God's people. That's what God said about them. That's their promised identity.

Now, with that in mind, turn with me to **1 Peter 2:9**.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Just like I mentioned in my introduction, Peter takes these truths said of Israel in the Old Testament and then applies them to the New Testament church, and if you noticed, the titles given to the church by Peter are similar to the titles given to Israel mentioned in **Exodus 19**.

Peter begins his passage by reminding them and us that we are a **chosen people** – a people belonging to God – a people purchased by the blood of Jesus for **God's own possession**. We have been claimed by God for Himself, and if you recall with Israel, God did not choose them because they were a great and mighty nation – but rather He chose them because He loved them (**Deut. 7:7-8**). And just like Israel, God did not choose us because we were deserving or we earned it somehow – instead He deliberately chose each of us as His own possession purely because of His love and His mercy towards us. We are chosen by God.

Peter also described us as a **royal priesthood** which is similar to what we looked at last week where Peter called us a *holy priesthood* – but when describing us as a royal priesthood, that brings up a different train of thought.

If you recall from last week, I gave a brief description of the Old Testament priests. Priests were those men who God had set apart to serve in the temple. As priests, they had special rights and responsibilities such as leading in worship and offering sacrifices to God. The ordinary Jew could not offer his own sacrifices; he had to go through the priest who offered his sacrifice for him. In that sense, the priest served as a go-between to bridge the gap between God and man. But as we learned last week, that's all changed. As believers in Christ, we are a holy priesthood, set apart for God's spiritual service with direct access to Him. We are priests.

But Peter adds that word “**royal**” – and that needs some explaining because these two words *royal* and *priesthood* are an odd pairing in the Old Testament.

That word “**royal**” in the Greek is *basileios*, which means “kingly” and it describes someone of kingly or royal ancestry or someone who is befitting a king – and let me tell you why this is so interesting.

Throughout the Old Testament, after the Law was given, there were two prominent positions in ancient Israel – that being the priest and the king, and by God’s command, no one person could serve in both positions. Priests were from the tribe of Levi – beginning with Aaron (**Numbers 3:10**), and kings were from the tribe of Judah (**Genesis 49:10**) – more specifically from the line of David. No one person could serve in these two positions, and king Saul learned that lesson the hard way when he disobeyed God and performed priestly duties, and as a consequence of his disobedience, he lost his kingship. So, no one person could be both a priest and a king – until Jesus. Jesus was both Priest and King – both a ruler of God’s people and the mediator between God and His people.

Now this is where it gets a little interesting for us. As born-again believers in Christ – saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been given both a kingly and a priestly status. We serve royalty – we serve the King of kings, and in Christ, we are royalty – we are a royal priesthood. That’s who God says we are.

So, we are a chosen people for God’s own possession, we are a royal priesthood, and as the church – we are a **holy nation**. If you recall, holy means to be *set apart*, to be *different*, and as the church, as the people of God, we have been set apart by God – no longer part of this world. Yes, we are in this world, but we are not of this world. We are separate.

Israel forgot that it was a holy nation and began to break down the walls of separation that made her special and unique from their pagan neighbors. We saw this over and over through our study in **Judges**. God commanded them to separate the *holy* from the *unholy*, to separate the *clean* from the *unclean*, to separate the *right* from the *wrong* – but they ignored the differences and disobeyed God. As the church, we are a special people. We are a unique people and our ways are to be different from the rest of the world.

We are a chosen people for God’s own possession, we are a royal priesthood, we are a holy nation, and we have a purpose – that being to **proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**, in other words, we are to reveal the praises of God to a lost and dying world.

Jesus previously spoke of this in **Matthew 5:16**, where He said,

“Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Because the world is “in the dark” biblically speaking, people who do not know God – need to see Him revealed in our lives. Each of us is to be a walking advertisement for God – and although believers may look like everyone else – our attitudes, our actions, and our speech should cause others to notice that we really aren’t like everyone else. The lost people around you may not have their theology straight, but our changed lives should cause them to ask – “**Why are you so different from everyone else?**”

In Christ, our lives are changed, and in **verse 10**, Peter gives us a reality check and reminds us that we were not always God’s people. He says,

“for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

In order to understand this passage, you need to know the story behind it.

In the Old Testament book of **Hosea**, we are told that Israel had gone into idolatry and essentially abandoned God, so God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer who was a prostitute.

This was a marriage between a man, who represented the faithfulness of God, and a woman who represented the unfaithfulness of God’s people – the Israelites.

Gomer had three children – all given names by God. The first was a son named ***Jezreel*** and his name means *God will scatter*. The second child was a daughter named ***Lo-ruhamah***, which means *no pity* or *no mercy*. And the third child, another son, was given the name of ***Lo-ammi***, meaning *not my people*. Those aren’t names you’d find in the list of popular baby names, but if you noticed, the names of these children coincide with God’s image of Israel.

Anyway, as the story goes, after bearing these three children, Gomer walks away from Hosea and she finds other lovers, representing the spiritual adultery of Israel. And although underserving, God tells Hosea that despite Gomer’s unfaithfulness to him, he is to go find her and pay off her debts to her lovers and recommit to her once again.

All of this was a symbol – a picture of God’s relentless and boundless love for His undeserving and ungrateful people. God could have divorced Israel because of her unfaithfulness, but instead, God pursued His people because of His love, and His mercy and His faithfulness to them, and God says in **Hosea 2:23**,

“I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘You are my God!’”

Peter uses this passage from **Hosea** to call attention to the fact that the church is made up of those who were formerly not a people of God and were not objects of God’s mercy. At one time, we were not counted among the chosen people of God – but now we are. At one time, we were not among those who received mercy as Israel did – but now we do – not because we deserve it or we have somehow earned it – but because of God’s love and mercy and faithfulness towards us.

God reminded Israel many times that He had delivered them so that they might glorify and serve Him – but Israel forgot who God is – they forgot who they were – and they forgot what He had done for them, and they drifted back into their sinful ways and became no different than the world around them. We can’t follow in their footsteps. We are a chosen people for God’s own possession, we are a royal priesthood, we are a holy nation, and we are a walking advertisement for our Lord.

That’s who God says we are, and in **verse 11**, Peter stresses the importance that we take our identity in Christ very seriously and that we live this out in our daily lives. He says,

“Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.”

Peter begins with the word **“beloved”** – once again reminding us who we are in Christ. We are God’s beloved, and He loves us and accepts us because we have placed our faith in His Son. It is so easy to overlook this, especially during hard and difficult times, but we cannot forget that as individuals, you and I were chosen by God, you and I are totally loved by Him, and you and I are completely accepted by Him. It’s so easy to forget this when things don’t seem to be going our way.

And once again, Peter tells us that we are **foreigners and strangers** in this world. He told us the same thing in the very first verse of his letter. We are just passing through – so we shouldn’t get attached to this place – we shouldn’t settle in here because this is not our home. We have another Promised Land in mind, it’s a

heavenly destination, and we should look forward to getting there. Howard Hendricks said, *“Most people think that they’re in the land of the living, heading toward the land of the dead. But the truth is, we’re in the land of the dying, heading toward the land of the living.”*

How true that is. We are foreigners who are walking in the land of the dying, walking on foreign soil, and Peter adds that we are walking in the middle of a war zone. There are sinful desires that war against us and want to defeat us. The word translated **“war”** carries the idea of a full military campaign against us. We do not win one battle, and the war is over, rather it’s a constant ongoing war, and to be honest, the war is not with people around us, but with the fleshly desires within each of us. D.L. Moody once said, *“I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know.”*

Every believer faces a lifelong struggle against these fleshly desires and if we yield to them, then we will start living like the unsaved world around us, we will experience an identity crisis, and we will become ineffective in our witness.

Peter told us to abstain from these fleshly desires, and in **verse 12**, he adds that there is something we are to continue to do.

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God on the day of visitation.”

In this verse, it would appear that the church was under scrutiny and criticism – likely being accused of all sorts of things by the unbelievers who were watching them and making their own excuses as to why they reject the gospel.

If people reject the gospel because they refuse to accept that Jesus is who He said He is – the Way, the Truth and the Life – I can handle that. I believe they are wrong, and I believe they are lost, but I can deal with it. But if people reject the gospel because of the behavior of believers – then that’s tragic. Mahatma Gandhi said, *“If it weren’t for Christians, I’d be a Christian.”*

That stings, but I think that is the thought that Peter is getting to here. Believers are to keep their behavior excellent among the unbelievers around them. The word **“behavior”** means conduct or one’s manner of life or lifestyle, and it points to the overall character of our Christian walk, and as a reminder by Peter, even if you’re not aware of it, unbelievers are watching your life. They see how you react to

things. They observe how you talk to others or talk about others. They watch how you deal with problems. They note how you treat your family. They see how brothers and sisters in Christ love one another, or do not love one another. We are an open book to a lost and dying world and our lives over the long haul should be characterized by our Christ-like behavior and our good deeds.

We are a chosen people for God's own possession, we are a royal priesthood, we are a holy nation, we are walking advertisement for our Lord, we are foreigners in foreign land – on the enemy's turf, and we are an open book to a lost and dying world. That's who we are in Christ. We are who He says we are – we just need to believe it and live like it.

While walking through the forest one day, a man found a young eagle who had fallen out of his nest. He took it home and put it in his barnyard where it soon learned to eat and behave like the chickens. One day a naturalist passed by the farm and asked why the king of all birds should be confined to live in the barnyard with the chickens. The farmer replied that since he had given it chicken feed and trained it to be a chicken, it had never learned to fly. Since it now behaved as the chickens, it was no longer an eagle.

“Still it has the heart of an eagle,” replied the naturalist, “and can surely be taught to fly.” He lifted the eagle toward the sky and said, “You belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly.” The eagle, however, was confused. He did not know who he was, and seeing the chickens eating their food, he jumped down to be with them again.

The naturalist took the bird to the roof of the house and urged him again, saying, “You are an eagle. Stretch forth your wings and fly.” But the eagle was afraid and jumped down once more for the chicken food. Finally, the naturalist took the eagle out of the barnyard to a high mountain. There he held the king of the birds high above him and encouraged him again, saying, “You are an eagle. You belong to the sky. Stretch forth your wings and fly.” The eagle looked around, back towards the barnyard and up to the sky. Then the naturalist lifted him straight towards the sun and it happened that the eagle began to tremble. Slowly he stretched his wings, and with a screech, soared away into the sky.

It may be that the eagle still remembers the chickens with nostalgia. It may even be that he occasionally revisits the barnyard. But as far as anyone knows, he has never returned to lead the life of a chicken.

Source Material:

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