

1 Peter 2:9-10

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 May 2013

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Who are you? How do you identify yourself? By your name, the family that you are a part of, the job you do, the country you're a citizen of, the team you support. Who are you?

A sense of identity is important, and Peter addresses this question of our identity in very stirring language in the verses that we're going to be considering this evening, verses 9 and 10 of 1 Peter chapter 2. Verses that are so familiar that their very familiarity introduces an added challenge in seeking to deal with them. But I think we'd all agree that even in the reading of these verses, we are met with very stirring language that tackles this matter of our identity. Who are we?

But before we look at the answer that Peter gives, we do have to be clear on what the question is that he is answering very specifically what the question is. He doesn't answer the question, who am I? Or the question, who are you? Though an answer is given to that, but more precisely, he answers the question, who are we? Who are we? His concern is not in the first instance with each of us individually, though there are many truths that we can draw from this that do apply to us individually, but Peter's concern is who are we collectively? We who are disciples of Jesus Christ. He's writing to disciples of Jesus, and he's addressing this question, well, who are you?

Scattered disciples of Jesus Christ across the world. Who are you? Who are we as the church of Jesus Christ? And I guess if we had to answer that question in a one-line slogan that paraphrases Peter's answer, summarizes Peter's answer, we could say this, we are the people of God. That is who we are. We are the people of God. And what I want to do this evening is explore three aspects of this reality concerning our identity, that we are the people of God. Three aspects of this reality that Peter highlights in our text.

And we can identify these three aspects of our identity by means of three questions, and they are as follows. First of all, how have we become the people of God? How is it that we are the people of God at all?

[2 : 59] How have we become the people of God? But then the second question is, what kind of people are we? And this is a question that Peter answers very eloquently in these two verses. We want to think a little bit about that. And then finally, for what purpose have we become the people of God?

So these are the three questions that I think are answered in verses 9 and 10 of 1 Peter chapter 2, and that we want to think about this evening. First of all then, how have we become the people of God?

I remember as a wee boy being taken by a family friend. I don't even remember who this person was. I was very wee. And I was taken by this friend of the family to a sweetie shop. I hope it was a friend of the family, and I wasn't following some stranger to the sweetie shop, but I'm pretty sure it would have been a friend of the family.

And this friend took me to a sweetie shop, I think, and I could be quite wrong, but for some reason I think it was in Dingwall. I don't know what I was doing in Dingwall, but anyway, I never lived in Dingwall, but I have this idea that it was in Dingwall.

So anyway, these are details that really aren't important, but just to give you a bit of a flavor for it, if you forgive the pun. But we went to the sweetie shop, and this friend said to me, you can have whatever you want.

[4 : 28] Now, in the few short years that I had lived, I don't think I'd ever heard such beautiful words. You can have whatever you want. This was the stuff of dreams.

But of course, beautiful though the words were, they did create a problem. What would I choose? I could have anything I wanted, but what would I choose?

Sadly, he didn't say you can have everything. He just said you can have anything you want. And I was very polite and well brought up, so I knew I couldn't take too much. But what would I choose? I could have anything, but what would I choose? Where would my eyes rest across this canopy of confectionery that was before me? And I feel a little like that with this passage.

These verses that we've read in 1 Peter 2, where do I start? Where am I most drawn? Of course, we don't need to choose, because it's all true.

[5 : 29] And it's all true concerning us. But if I did have to choose, the words that I find most precious, or the words that I am most drawn to, are the words with which our text closes.

In verse 10. Now, it's not that Peter's argument closes there, but in terms of the verses that we're considering. The final words of verse 10.

But now, you have received mercy. Or if we can paraphrase that. But now, we have received mercy.

And these words get to the heart of the matter of how we have become the people of God. That's the question we're dealing with. How have we become the people of God?

These words get to the heart of the matter. But now, we have received mercy. Now, Peter here in verse 10 is drawing on language found in the passage that we read in the prophet Hosea.

[6 : 41] Where by means of the names given to Hosea's sons, and the prophecy concerning a change in their names, God speaks of this transformation.

Once we were not a people, but now we are a people. Once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. Our becoming a people, our becoming the people of God, is grounded in grace.

It's moored in mercy. It's moored in mercy. But now, you have received mercy. This is the heart of the matter.

It's all of God. It's all about grace. It's all about what God has given, and we have received. We become the people of God as we receive mercy.

All we do is receive. It's so simple, the language, and perhaps that's why I'm drawn to it. We receive mercy.

[7 : 48] We are fundamentally passive in this matter of becoming the people of God. We receive mercy. God gives, and we receive.

Just think for a moment about how we sometimes speak about mercy. Not in the context necessarily of the gospel or of matters religious, but more generally how we speak about mercy. We sometimes speak of begging for mercy. You can imagine a scenario where you might be in a terrible situation and somebody is about to do you great harm. I trust you'll never be in that situation, and you have to beg for mercy.

Or we maybe think of the language of crying out for mercy. Such language might suggest that mercy is secured as a function of how loud we cry or how low we stoop as we beg for it.

We beg for it, and we lose all dignity, and we beg that the one who is about to do us harm would be merciful to us.

[8 : 56] The gospel presents an altogether different, diametrically opposed scenario. We receive mercy from a God who delights in mercy, from a God who delights in dispensing generously mercy.

Of course, it is true that we find in the Bible and in our own experience the language and the reality of crying out for mercy. Of course, we do. The psalmist repeatedly speaks of crying out for mercy. It is something that we can and something that we must do. But, and this is the point, or the point that we want to emphasize now, even our crying out is the result of God's constraining as He, by His Spirit, enables us to cry out for mercy.

The big truth and the answer to our question concerning how we have become the people of God is that God gives and we receive mercy.

He looks down upon us in our broken and flawed condition. He sees us steeped in misery and in sin and in darkness, and He has mercy upon us.

[10 : 17] In and through His Son, Jesus Christ, He mercifully rescues us and showers us with His mercy. If we return for a moment to the passage in Hosea, not, you don't need to do it in the Bible, but just in our thoughts.

Hosea was looking forward prophetically to a day when the people who had not received mercy would receive mercy. He is looking forward to a day and He even speaks of it as that day.

We know something of the significance of prophets speaking of on that day. And it is in that way that He introduces His prophecy on that day. On that day, the people of God would experience restoration.

The people of God from whom God had withdrawn in a measure His mercy would once again know and enjoy His mercy.

They would be restored. And what Peter concludes in drawing from Hosea in his letter, what Peter concludes very clearly is that that day that Hosea speaks of finds fulfillment in the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 38] How do we become the people of God? We become the people of God as we receive mercy. But also, we want to answer the question, what kind of people are we?

Having established how we become the people of God, we can now consider what kind of people we are. Now, we have the language of verse 9 that is, I think, so familiar to us.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. And we're familiar with the language, and it is stirring language, it warms our soul, and it would be tempting to jump straight in and consider this fourfold description of the church in verse 9.

But if we were to jump in and begin to look at each of these descriptions, individually as it were, then we might miss out on the big picture.

What we need to do, or what we are going to try and do, is to consider what all four truths that Peter declares here in verse 9 concerning the church, how all four truths compositely declare concerning who we are.

[12 : 57] Now, of course, there is merit in looking at each of the constituent parts and what we can learn from each of the descriptions. We'll do that a little, but a lot less than perhaps would ordinarily be done when this text is being considered.

Our greater concern this evening is to consider the big picture. So, let's try and do that. As we've already said from the very beginning, Peter here is addressing the question of identity.

Who are we? And the answer he gives is clear. Drawing on the language and the imagery of the Old Testament, Peter concludes that we, believers in Jesus Christ, are the people of God.

In the Old Testament, we know, we have revealed to us how God chose a people for himself. And in the New Testament, he also chooses a people for himself.

And we are that people. We who are disciples of Jesus, we are that people. But Peter is saying more than simply identifying Christians as the new people of God.

[14 : 06] He is certainly saying that. But he's doing more than just saying that. I think what Peter is doing is recognizing two complementary realities that concern, on the one hand, the restoration of God's people, following on very much from the passage in Hosea that speaks of restoration.

But in parallel to Peter speaking of the restoration of God's people, he's also speaking about the fulfillment of God's prophetic announcements concerning His people.

Now, these two realities overlap, but they are distinct. This aspect of restoration that Peter is alluding to and using the language of the Old Testament, but also the reality of fulfillment.

Now, let me just try and explain that a little further. The church of Jesus Christ, we are the restored people of God. But it's not just about restoration.

God is doing a new thing. There is continuity. The language of restoration speaks of continuity. The language of restoration speaks of that which already exists being restored.

[15 : 21] It's not something completely new. We're not talking about God beginning with a blank sheet of paper. No, there's continuity. There is this aspect of restoration.

The people of God who had drifted from God and who had departed from God, and now God is restoring His people. And we, the church, believers in Jesus Christ, are that restored people of God. There is continuity. But there's also the fulfillment of the manner in which the prophecies in the Old Testament speak of that which will be greater than what was before.

The church becoming that which Israel never was. Becoming more than what Israel was. Well, it's fine to say that, but where do we get this from the text?

The language that Peter uses there in verse 9 is language we find in the Old Testament to describe God's people. There in verse 9, you are a chosen people.

[16 : 27] There are so many passages in the Old Testament we could refer to that we're spoiled for choice, but maybe the one that is most striking and perhaps most familiar to us would be in Deuteronomy chapter 7 where we read, for 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, His treasured possession. The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples. God was very clear as He fixed His eyes upon Israel that this was the result of His sovereign choice.

He chose Israel. And Peter addresses the Christians scattered all over the world and he says, You are a chosen people. You are the Israel of God.

[17:40] But then we have also in verse 9 the language of a royal priesthood and of a holy nation. This language also is drawn from the Old Testament descriptions of God's people and very explicitly drawn from what we read in Exodus chapter 19 and verses 5 and 6.

These are the words of God to Moses in Sinai when the people had just been brought out of Egypt. What did God say? Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is Mine you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And it's clear that Peter is drawing this very language of God directed to the people through Moses as He addresses Christians scattered all over the world.

You are a royal priesthood a holy nation. And then we have the language of a people belonging to God there in verse 9 also.

Now the exact expression that Peter uses a people belonging to God is not found in that precise manner in the Old Testament but given what Peter goes on to say concerning our purpose that we're going to come to in a moment that we are called in order to declare the praises of Him.

[19:05] Given that it seems reasonable to imagine that what Peter has in mind is a passage that we find in Isaiah chapter 43 verses 19 to 21.

We won't read all three verses I'll just read the very first statement there in verse 19 of chapter 43 and then what goes on to be said in verse 21.

Isaiah 43 verse 19 begin See I am doing a new thing. God declares See I am doing a new thing.

And then in verse 21 having said other things in between that we won't focus on this evening the people I form for myself that they may proclaim my praise that they might declare my praises.

And so this description of the people of God is proclaiming the praises of God following on from this declaration of intent and the part of God See I am doing a new thing.

Peter then is declaring that the church enjoys the same privileged status and description as God's people in the Old Testament. The church is or has become the restored Israel of God but not just restored as the passage in Isaiah 43 declares I am doing a new thing.

[20:25] God goes beyond simply restoration. Restoration is wonderful in itself but God goes beyond restoration in establishing His church.

In the church we see a new or restored people of God but also a people of God that answers to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. To just illustrate from some of the themes here in chapter 2 the physical temple this is something we were thinking about last week the physical temple has become a living house made up of living stones.

See there we don't only have restoration you see restoration would have been the temple being restored to the glory days of David and Solomon but God does more than that He goes beyond that to fulfilling His prophecies concerning His people.

The chosen people are no longer only those descended from Abraham but also those of every nation who have received mercy the kingdom of priests where in the past a few of God's people served as priests in representation of the many has become a royal priest to where every believer is a priest in the service of God and we could go on.

But I think you can see the two aspects of this both restoration but also fulfillment of something greater. John Calvin teaches on this in speaking of the designation that Peter uses here a royal priesthood he says you are royal priests and indeed in a more excellent way and here he's contrasting with the Old Testament in a more excellent way because you are each of you consecrated in Christ that you may be the associates of His kingdom and the partakers of His priesthood.

[22 : 17] Who are we? We are a chosen people. We are a royal priesthood. We are a holy nation. We are a people belonging to God. But let's move on to our final question.

For what purpose have we become the people of God? This is our final question and it is the question that sheds light on our identity in the matter of purpose.

Not only who we are but what we are intended to be and to do. What is our purpose? Why have we received mercy?

We can put it in that way. Why has God conferred on us such a privileged status? And the answer that Peter gives is very clear. We read there in verse 9 I think we can all easily understand that. It's not complicated. It's clear. This is our ultimate purpose to declare God's praises. This is even more importantly God's purpose in making us His own that we would declare His praises.

[23 : 46] The word translated there in verse 9 praises is an interesting word and it's a word that can also be translated excellencies. Some Bible versions opt for that word excellencies.

You'll find the ESV opts for the word excellencies in place of the word praises. Either is correct but I think the word excellencies captures something that might not be so evident in the word praises.

What Peter is saying is that we are to declare God's excellencies. The excellencies are perfections of His person. The excellencies of His work.

And it is in this that we find true purpose. It is in declaring His excellencies that we find the reason why we exist.

Why we have received mercy. Why we have been chosen. Why we are a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Why we belong to God. God. The answer to our search for ultimate meaning lies in declaring the excellencies of God.

[24 : 57] This is true for us as individual believers but also corporately as the church of Jesus Christ. As a church. As a congregation. As bon accord. We exist to declare the excellencies of God.

That is why we are here. That is why God has placed us here. It would be a very helpful thing for us and I would encourage you to do this. To simply ask the question.

Are we doing that? That is the reason we exist. Are we doing that? Are we declaring the excellencies of God? Now a follow on question from that practical one would be well how do we do that?

Okay that is what we need to do. That is the purpose of our existence. But how do we do that? How do we declare the excellencies of God? Well we can do so in so many ways.

We do so in praise. We do so in prayer. We do so in testimony and conversation. We do so in witness. We do so in service. We do so in the lives we live and the love that we show.

[26 : 02] And of course in each of these things we could detain ourselves and think in greater depth but we are not going to do so. Rather we are simply going to end where we began and ask the question who are you?

Who are you? Are you fulfilling your purpose? Who are we? And are we fulfilling our purpose?

Let us pray. Heavenly Father we come to you and we come to you with thanksgiving. We come to say thank you for all that you have done for us.

For this privileged status that we enjoy. We thank you that we are indeed those who have received mercy. Indeed those who continue to receive mercy for we ever stand in need of your mercy.

And as we thank you for mercy received. As we thank you for status conferred. Lord we do pray that you would help us to fulfill the purpose for which all of these things have been effected in our lives.

[27 : 15] That we would indeed declare the excellencies of the one who has rescued us from darkness and brought us into your wonderful light.

Help us then we pray and we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Let's close our service this evening by singing Psalm 40 in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 40 and we'll sing verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 40 verses 1 to 5 we'll sing to the tune Martyrdom. I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear at length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear.

The psalmist goes on to speak of how he was rescued by God but he also speaks of how he responds to God's rescue to God's mercy. He put a new song in my mouth our God to magnify many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely.

He declares the excellencies of God and as we sing and as we are reminded of what the psalmist did in response to God's mercy may we also be challenged to do the same.

[28 : 26] Psalm 40 verses 1 to 5 and we'll stand to sing. Amen. He did in my my voice and cry to hear He screwed me from the fearful bit and from the my reclaimed and on our rock

He set my feet He star will shade my way He He put a new song in my heart He put a new song in my heart He put a new song in my heart He will see He shall fear and on the Lord rely He will be blessed God is the one who trust upon the

Lord we rise we rise respect in God the proud nor such must turn aside to rise Lord my God O many are the wonders Thou hast done thy gracious thoughts to us work far above all thoughts are gone in order

God can recommend to thee it then declare and speak of them I would they more than can be numbered are and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always amen