

The Stabilizing Power of Our Identity in Christ Part 4

Our Identity in Christ

By Ty Blackburn

Bible Text: 1 Peter 2:4-10
Preached on: Sunday, March 12, 2023

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Turn within your Bibles to 1 Peter 2. We come to the end of the section we've been looking at for some time, verses 4 to 10. This morning, we'll be looking at verses 9 and 10 of this passage from the first epistle of Peter. We continue to exposit this wonderfully relevant letter. We've understood that Peter is burdened to strengthen believers for a time that is increasingly hostile to them. They're experiencing social opposition, spiritual opposition, and increasing cultural hostility. As they are, as Christians, experiencing this hostility and they're about to experience great persecution, Peter writes this letter about a year before a massive persecution breaks out in Rome under the Emperor Nero. And so in the providence of God, he writes to prepare the people of God for the coming storm.

We've said that this particularly significant issue to Peter is the sense of identity. It's one of his main themes in this epistle. He wants the believer in the first century, those to whom he writes, and us in turn, to examine how we see ourselves. Identity is all about how do you see yourself. What is one's sense of self. Something very much in the news today, much on the minds of people, this whole idea of identity. There's been a paradigm shift in how people in the world see themselves. Identity politics, something that's been continually used in recent decades. Who you are is your ethnicity or who you are is your particular interest group. Your particular sense of identity is defined by the fact that you're a part of a group. It can be ethnic, it can also be just a lifestyle choice. You are who you are in terms of these things. One's sense of self is determined by his group identity. We also live in a day of amazing confusion regarding the issue of gender. It's called gender fluidity, that is the idea that gender is determined by the individual, self-determined. You define who you are. What we see in the Scripture is that God defines who we are. We don't define who we are. This is a very different message that we have for the world. The Lord has made us and not we ourselves. We read from Psalm 100 earlier. God is the one who made you. He made you to be male or female. It's not something that you can determine for yourself and it's something this confusion in the culture is bringing great harm to people. I mean, you can take hormone blockers, you can have surgical procedures, but you cannot change your sexual identity. You cannot change your biological identity. You can only maim what God has given you. Every cell of your body has chromosomes XX or XY. XX female, XY male. If they dig us up a hundred years after we die, they will know whether you were a man or a woman. No matter what kind of surgery you had, no matter who you pretended to be, it's in the wiring of the cell.

That's the truth. God determines who we are. We don't determine ourselves. We understand that there are people experiencing profound psychological pain. They need to be objects of our compassion. Folks that are experiencing intense social difficulty because of the conflicted feelings that they have inside. But the answer is to help them, not to hurt them, not to enable them to do more damage to themselves. The way you help someone is to help them accept the identity that God gave them. Not easy, but it is the right way, the best way, the only way.

This sense of identity and self is something that Peter was so concerned to make clear to the believers in the first century, this early church group of believers in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. He hammers it home again and again and again. You are who God says you are and as Christians, you are who God says you are. Let's read the passage again, and we're going to come, in verses 9 and 10, I'm going to start at verse 4 to get the context, but in verses 9 and 10 you're going to hear no less than six different phrases that tell us who God says we are in Christ, four in verse 9 and two in verse 10 that tell us who we are. We'll begin reading at verse 4 of 1 Peter 2.

4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," 8 and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, 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; 10 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.

Beautiful picture and portrait of who we are in Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word. We pray now that You might open it up to us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, that You might enable us to take Your truth to heart, that we would walk in it, submit to it, repent where we need to repent, and trust more in Christ that we might be what You called us to be. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So again, the title of the message is "The Stabilizing Power of our Identity in Christ." That's been the focus in this passage, verses 4 to 10, and it is like Peter is driving in nails. He's just hitting this same theme again and again and again because it is so fundamental and essential to the well-being of Christians. We must know who we are.

Now, I want you to note something before we get into the outline itself this morning and this is the idea of how God sees you is contrasted with how others see you. Now, this is built on the fact that this whole idea of identity came up in relation to what he said about Jesus. He starts into this expansion, expanded discussion of our identity by, first of all, talking about the identity of Jesus. Remember, he's going to tell us in verses 4 and 5 that you are, in verse 5, you're living stones being built into a temple, you're also a priesthood. But he starts out by telling us who Jesus is contrasted with who the world says he is. In verse 4, he said, "coming to Him," that is to Christ, "as to a living stone which has been rejected by men but is choice and precious in the sight of God." You see the contrast. Jesus rejected by men. We talked about this word last time. It means to carefully examine, thoroughly investigate. They looked carefully at Jesus and they rejected him. The same idea as in verse 7, "the stone which the builders rejected." It's the same word. To look at carefully, to examine in an experiment or the testing of metal, to test it carefully. They tested carefully and they rejected him. So the world looks at Jesus and rejects him but the contrast is with how the world sees Jesus and how God sees Jesus. Back in verse 4, he's rejected by men but is choice and precious in the sight of God. He is elect and he is highly valued, indeed treasured by God. So the world looks and rejects, but God looks at Jesus and says, "He is my chosen One." And the idea of choosing is to select out of many possibilities. He's chosen. This is the one. Jesus is the one God has set his approval on. This is the one, Jesus is the one God has chosen.

Now, that idea also becomes clear later when he talks about the stone the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone. The precious corner stone. Everything is built on Jesus. So you have this contrast of how the world sees Christ and how God sees Christ and what he's going to do is basically say, you see Jesus the way God sees Jesus and you need to see yourselves the way God sees you. You need to see Jesus the way God sees Jesus, not the way the world sees Jesus. You need to see yourselves the way God sees you, not the way the world sees you. This is what he's doing. He's building on that foundation. It's not how the world sees Christ that matters, it's how God sees Christ that matters. That's the only thing that matters. All of them can reject him. God says he is the one he has appointed, therefore, he is God's elect and choice corner stone and you reject him at your own peril. Choose to believe what God says about Jesus. And then when he comes into this, like I said, this drumbeat almost of who you are in Christ, one of the reasons he's driving it home is because we are told by the world something very different. You see, the same world that hates Jesus hates you if you love Jesus and so you must learn to see yourself as God sees you.

Now, Jesus makes this clear actually. Well, let me show you this first of all in Peter's heart, why this is so important to him. He's telling them, as I said, there's four different phrases in verse 9: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people for God's own possession. All of those things are true of you if you're in Christ. Verse 10, you once

were not a people, but now you're the people of God, that's the fifth term. You once had not received mercy but now you are the recipients of mercy, that's the sixth term. He wants you to know that because in the next couple of verses, he's going to talk about how other people see you and he's going to do this throughout the letter. Let me show you verse 12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers." You see, the Gentiles, unbelievers, Peter says, are slandering you as evildoers. God says you're chosen, God says you're a royal priesthood, God says you're a holy nation, they say you're evildoers.

He continues on, chapter 3, turn over to chapter 3 verses 13 to 16. There Peter writes, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." They're trying to intimidate you. They're trying to trouble you. They're opposing you. They're saying bad things about you. Chapter 4, verses 3 and 4, "For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you." Do you see that? They don't take the changes happening in your life and just say, "Hey, I'm very happy for you." No, the fact that you don't run with them after the same sinful lusts and pleasures that you formerly did before you became a believer makes them malign you, hate you, speak hatefully to you.

Now down to chapter 4 verses 12 and 14. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." It's saying it's going to be very normal for you to be reviled for the name of Christ. Because you love Jesus, they will revile you.

So Peter understands this is the setting in which this new church is enmeshed. The world is telling them, "You're evildoers. We hate you. We malign you." And God is saying something very different. Now Jesus even made this clear, in fact, turn over with me to John's gospel for a moment, to see this. John shows this so clearly in his gospel, how the world sees Jesus is how the world sees the believer when the believer is walking in the light of Christ. In chapter 1, look how the world receives Jesus. There was the true light, chapter 1, verse 9, "There was the true Light," that is Christ, "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Wow, the light has come into the world. This is good news. Verse 10, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." The world didn't know him. "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." He comes into the world, he's the light of the world, and no one receives him as the light with joy as they ought to.

Turn over to chapter 3. He expands on this after his discussion with Nicodemus. He says this in verse 19, chapter 3, John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For

everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." So Jesus is the light. He came into the world in his holiness, he is God in flesh tabernacling among us. And so what happened is when God in flesh comes to say, "I'm making a way of salvation to come back to Me," his very presence, his holiness exposes sin, which is what needs to happen. All of us need our sin exposed so that we can turn to him and receive his forgiveness and his salvation but what happens is people don't want to be confronted with their sin and so they hate the light. Well then, he says also that now that you believe, you are the light of the world. You're the light of the world. So you go out into the world and you live for God, you love God, your life is changed and what's happening? You become more like him, you become more holy, and what is happening? Light is shining out into darkness. And though you are finding life and you're offering life to people, you're saying to others, like we're talking about who are struggling with just the confusion of this world that is destroying them, and you speak truth, and unless God accompanies it with his grace, they're going to reject it, and they're going to reject you.

He continues this theme as he comes to the night before his crucifixion. John 15, before we go back to 1 Peter, I want you to see this too. John 15:18. This is the night before he's crucified. He says his famous last words, as it were, to his disciples before he goes to the cross. In the Upper Room, this Upper Room discourse, chapter 13 to chapter 17 of John, he says in verse 18, this is 15:18, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."

Same theme in chapter 16, verses 1 to 4. He says, "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God." That's amazing. They go out as the bearers of good news, the message of salvation that saves people from an eternity separated from God, the most important message in the world, the most loving message in the world, the greatest good news that the world could ever have imagined. God has made a way to forgive sinners like you and me. He's made a way for us to come into his presence forever, holy and righteous because of what Jesus has done. We can do nothing. He's done everything. That's the good news. But when you take that message, they think you're an enemy. He says that they're going to kill you and think they're offering service to God. They're going to be so mixed up in their thinking that they're going to think killing you is the right thing to do. Verse 3 of John 16, "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them."

He says, listen, you have to be aware this is what's going to happen. This is the norm. Throughout history, this is the norm the antipathy to the truth. You know in the first century, the Roman people, the Roman authorities and the people called Christians, this little fledgling group of believers who were preaching the gospel, who were doing good,

do you know what they called Christians? In Latin, enemies of the human race. That's the English actually. I didn't write the Latin down, I don't remember it. But they spoke Latin, so they said it in Latin, they didn't say it in English. No extra charge for that helpful lesson. Enemies of the human race. Think about that though. Believers, Christians are enemies of the human race. How can that be? They're just preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. They're just telling people the truth. They're just showing people the way in a world that is filled with darkness and the misery, the misery that comes from walking in darkness. The world is miserable and not only miserable, they're compounding their misery on their way to hell and we have the truth, the life-giving truth that you can stop, you can stop living for yourself, you can stop being enslaved to sin, you can submit to Christ and be free forever, you could be righteous forever. God can break the chains of whatever's holding you and binding you. God will break the chains. Christ is able. That's the message. We proclaim the message. Liberate the captives. Let them go free. Let the blind see. Let the deaf hear. Let the lame walk. That is the message that we have and we're talking about spiritual healings that are far greater than physical healings. You who are lame spiritually, Christ will make you able to walk. You who can't see spiritually, he will give you eyes to see. You who can't hear spiritually, he will unstop your deaf ears so that you hear his word, you see his glory, and you're able to walk in his holiness. And the message that we take is that message and we would expect that it would be received with gratitude but that's only because we haven't read our Bibles carefully enough. It ought to be but so insidious and evil is sin that it blinds the person to the level that the person who's bringing life they perceive as bringing death.

Enemies of humanity. I mean, they had some reasons that they thought this. They were confused about some of the message of Christianity. You know, that a man dying on a cross, an instrument of execution was somehow the way of salvation. It's puzzling. Yes, it is. The Scripture that we had read earlier from John 6, Jesus' provocative language that you must eat my flesh and drink my blood to be saved. He's not meaning that literally but he's saying something provocative because people need to be shocked out of their complacency and their spiritual deadness. He's saying something so provocative, he's saying something offensive. He's saying, "Look, you are so lost." And he's saying it to Jewish people. These were the people that were closest to God in proximity spiritually but he says, "You're still so far away that you need to forget about the manna that your fathers ate, the physical miracles they saw, and you need a spiritual miracle, an inner transformation that comes out of embracing Me and receiving Me and all that I have done for you into the depths of your being, the depths of your soul. That My blood and My body being torn apart on that cross, My blood being shed, the sacrifice I'm making on the cross, you need the benefits of that more than you need your food. And if you will trust in Me and receive Me and receive," and the message that's so offensive is you and I are so lost that it took God the Son being treated as he was, abandoned on the cross, and God the Father's wrath being poured out on him. That's what it took to save you and me. You don't need a boost up. You need a radical transformation to be saved. There's no helping us. We need a new heart that only Christ can give. That's the message. It is offensive on the front end. Yes, it is. That's the offense of the cross. It's foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1. But to those who are the called, it is Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God.

Now, so you take that message and you know it is a loving message. It's the most wonderful message. And you're to take it. You're not to hide it. You're not to put your light under a peck measure. You're to let it shine. And this passage is going back to 1 Peter now, we're back to 1 Peter. You're supposed to make known the excellency of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. You're to widely publish that message so that God will save those whom he saves through the proclamation of his glorious gospel. He will do it. But if you're going to do that, you have to know who you are.

And so we're now to the outline. Two points. You've got to know who you are and what you're to do. That's what he says and he hammers this home in verses 9 and 10. Who are you? You're not who the world says you are. You're not the enemies of humanity. No, you're not. If you're a Christian, if they could see correctly, when you proclaim the gospel, Isaiah 52 says, how lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. Your feet are lovely. Nobody's feet are the most lovely part about them. Some of us, that's even more true than others, right? But if you bear the gospel, the very feet that bring you to the person to speak that liberating message and the message is your God reigns, Isaiah 52:7, your God reigns, your God has done what is necessary to save you, he invites you to come to him, the feet of you, of the person who does that, is beautiful, beautiful.

He's going to tell you that here in this passage. He wants us to know that. So the first point this morning, you need to know who you are. You are chosen. You are chosen. I just picked one word out of this litany that he's about to go into because it's the first word that he says. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. Those four wonderful terms, he's going to use two more in chapter 2 verse 10, the people of God, the recipients of mercy. He's taking terms that were so theologically rich and loaded terms that were used to speak of Israel, the Old Covenant people. He's actually quoting from three different passages in the Old Testament here with these terms he's using. These six terms come from three different passages. One is Exodus 19, right after they leave Egypt. They come to Mount Sinai. Two of the terms, you're a royal priesthood and a holy nation, come from Exodus 19. The other passage is Isaiah 43:20 and 21. Chosen race, you're a chosen race, you're a people for God's own possession. In Hosea 1 and 2, you're the people of God, you're the recipients of mercy.

So Exodus, Isaiah, Hosea, these three passages, and what he's doing is he's saying, listen, all that was true of Israel and its preciousness to God is now true of you who have become sons of Abraham through faith. Your identity has dramatically changed. You are not who you were. No, you are precious to God, so much so, and it's like he piles one term on top of another. Each of these terms, we could spend an hour talking about and unpacking. He piles one on top of another so that we feel the weight of term upon term, these endearments, these wondrous descriptions, this affectionate, loving terminology that God uses, this honoring, dignifying terminology that God is laying on top of you as a believer one after another, saying, "Feel the weight of My love for you. Feel the weight of how precious you are to Me. Know it. At the very core of your being, know these things so that you can be what I've called you to be in the world, the world that is hostile to you."

Let's just walk through the terms quickly and then we'll look at the Old Testament background a little bit later. You're a chosen race. Some other passages say chosen people, chosen generation. The word for "race" is not really the English word we use, race, but it means those who are begotten, family lineage, actually have some connotation of family. You're God's chosen family member. In the same way that your blood relatives are related to you, it does have that connotation that you've become a part of the blood relationship of God not through physical birth, but through new birth, through the blood of Christ. That's what makes us blood relatives. You're blood relatives with the people that really matter are the people who are blood relatives to you through the blood of Jesus.

You're a chosen race. The idea of chosen, I mentioned a little bit ago, means to choose for oneself. It means preference and selection from among many choices. So God is saying, listen, the fact that you now have eyes to see and ears to hear, and you love him, even though the world hates you, know that you have been chosen by God. He has brought you to himself. He's chosen you out of the world. Yes, the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, everyone's responsible to believe the gospel. We make known the gospel to everyone. We say repent and believe. You must repent and believe. Yes, you must. But once you have repented and believed, you can know you've done so because you were chosen by God. The mystery of divine election. But don't let that slip away. The wonder of it. He uses that term again and again. He began the letter with that. In verse 1, this is chapter 1, verse 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen." The First thing he says about you other than where you live, you are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. You're a chosen race.

You're a royal priesthood. You're a priesthood. That is, you have access to God. That's the key defining issue for priests in the Old Testament is they were the ones who were able to enter into the temple courts, the temple itself. Any male could enter in to a certain point. Women could enter to a certain point. Males could go a little farther. Then the priest could go into the actual building itself, the tabernacle or the temple. Only priests. But he's saying now, those of you who believe in Jesus, every one of you, male, female, no matter where you come from, if you believe in Jesus, you have full access into the Holy of Holies today.

And not only that, you're a royal priesthood. You're a priesthood who belongs to the King. This speaks of the royal dignity that is yours. When you come into his presence, you come with royal robes on. We can't see them. They're invisible to us, but in the eyes of God, you walk in to his presence, the angels take note. "That one belongs to Christ. He's a royal priest." The Scripture says that we will reign with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth.

So know that you are not, though the world says you're nothing, you're chosen, and you have access into the very throne of the universe and you come in with your head held high, not because of who you are. If that was up to us, we could never even think about entering. No matter how good we think our life is, the Bible says your righteousness is as

filthy rags in the sight of God. You need to be washed in the blood of Christ, just like I do. We need to be washed completely in his blood and when we do, though, when we've been washed in his blood, then your righteousness is so righteous and perfect that there is no stain. You are unblemished and holy in the sight of God, and you come into his presence with that understanding.

You're a holy nation, the third term, that is, you now have a national identity that is with the people of God, and you are the distinct part of being a part of the people of God is you've been set apart for God's purposes. Holy, that which is no longer common, that which is no longer profane. You now have this special place in the eyes of God. See, he's layering term upon term these nuances piling up upon one another.

Then he says a people for God's own possession. A people for God's own possession. I'm reading the New American Standard, the NIV says "a people belonging to God." The ESV says "a people for his own possession." King James says "a peculiar people." It's trying to translate a term that is difficult to translate into Greek but it means that which has been purchased for oneself. It emphasizes the fact that we belong to him and that, Ted was mentioning earlier, you go to the store, you buy something at the convenience store, it's not that big a deal, right? I don't think you can buy anything that significant at the convenience store. I guess maybe if you go to Buc-ees, you might have something that you think is a little more valuable, although I question that. Anyway, sorry about that. But if you have something that's really valuable and precious to you, you protect it and you think about it in a different way. He's using this term, a people for God's own possession has the idea of that which God deeply values. It's not something that he can replace at the convenience store. No, you are something that he looks at. Every single one of you who belong to Christ, God looks at you like that. In his infinite majesty, in his ability to be completely aware of everything all at once, he's able. He's not distracted from you by his love for someone else. No, he's always loving you with this kind of love. Every moment of every day for all eternity, God is able to love his people like that.

Then you skip ahead to verse 10. We're still looking at who we are, not what we're to do. What we're to do is to proclaim his excellence. We'll come back to that in a moment. Verse 10, you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Here he's alluding to and quoting from Hosea, the prophecy of Hosea. Hosea 1:6 and 9, chapter 2:23, and what he's basically he's calling to mind the beautiful picture that Hosea brings to us. Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom. Israel was a united kingdom under David, well, under Saul, David, and Solomon. It broke into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon, the northern kingdom, which was still called Israel, and the southern kingdom, which was called Judah. The northern kingdom quickly departed from God and was destroyed in 722 BC, only 200 years after the death of Solomon. Hosea was one of the early prophets to the northern kingdom. He's basically telling them God's going to judge you because you're being so unfaithful, you're so spiritually, and he uses the image of spiritual adultery. And Hosea marries, if you remember, God tells Hosea, the prophet, to marry a prostitute, Gomer, and to love her, have children with her, as an expression of how God loves Israel. And then, you remember, Gomer leaves him and goes back after her life of prostitution. Here she had a man who loved her, who was caring for her. After all that

time of emptiness, she had a man who loved her, and what did she do? She went right back into her sinful evil past. And he did this to show this is what God's love for his people has been like and as a part of it, the first chapter, when she conceives and has two children with Hosea, and he names the first child Lo-ruhamah in Hebrew. Lo means not. Ruhamah means compassion. So no compassion. He names this daughter, no compassion. God says, name her that. Kind of a tough name to have, but God's teaching something very important. He's basically saying, "Your sin is so great, I will have no compassion on you." Then she has a son, and he says, name him Lo-ammi. Lo, not. Ammi, my people. "I will have no compassion, and you are not My people, for you have run away from Me. I came after you, I loved you, I drew you to Myself, and you have kept on running away from Me." But the beauty of what Hosea is, there's the promise that's laced throughout it. In chapter 2:23 he says, "I will call those who are not, there's a day coming when I will speak tenderly, I'll find you in the wilderness, I'll speak tenderly, and I'll draw you to Myself." Think about the man Hosea, his wife, unfaithfulness, continued unfaithfulness, and yet, still he goes and he finds her. Now, he doesn't do it, God's going to find the wicked Israel, draw her to himself, and he's going to say, "In the same way I said you're not My people, you are My people. In the same way I had no compassion now you will have compassion."

This is what Peter is referring to. He's saying the believing Gentiles, mostly Gentile churches that he's writing to, there's Jewish and Gentiles, but mostly Gentiles, that is non-Jews, who've been saved, God has now said, "Though you used to live completely away from God, running away from God, hating God, God has made you His people. God has loved you like God loved Israel through Hosea. You are now the special object of His pleasure. He's come after you. He didn't let you keep running away. He chased you down, and He's brought you near, and you now have received mercy." You didn't deserve it, no, but he's brought it to you, and you will receive mercy. This is what he's saying. That's who you are. If you've repented and placed your faith in Christ, that's who you are. And if you haven't, do so today and you can claim these promises. Jesus says, "Just come to Me and be saved. I will save whoever comes to Me, and I will by no means cast them out." Ask God to give you eyes to see, ears to hear, and run to Christ. And once you have, this is who you are. You have a new identity: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people belonging to God, the people of God who have received mercy. That's who you are.

Now, second point this morning, not only are you chosen, that's who you are, now you need to know what you're to do. And this is the second point, you are called to proclaim his perfection. That's what you're to do. It's really simple. This is it. Scripture has different ways of describing our duty, but this is really a great summary of what we're called to do. This is your purpose. Every day you wake up in the morning as a believer in Jesus Christ, you have one job, and it is to proclaim the excellency of God. You see, the world needs to hear that more than anything else. The world, the lie that Satan has sold to the world, he started back in the garden of Eden when he got Eve to question God's goodness. Remember? God had said, God filled the world with so many good things. The world was all good. There was just this one tree in the middle of the garden. It was the knowledge of good and evil. It wasn't bad, but they weren't supposed to, it was one thing that God said no to. Think about it. The whole world was open and there was just one

prohibition, that one tree. God made it clear, "In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die. Don't eat of it." Satan came along and said, "Has God said that you should not eat of any tree of the garden?" I love how he operates. Such an evil liar. He posits the idea, "God doesn't let you eat from any of these trees, does He?" You see, he's already questioning, "What's God like? I know God and He's like this. He would put all of these trees, all of these trees here and say you can't eat of any of them. Isn't that what He said?" And she said, "No, He didn't say that. He just said we can't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center of the garden for the day we eat of it, we will die." Satan says, "You surely shall not die." Directly contradicts God. "God's lied to you," he says. "God's not good." He's already brought in the question by saying, "He probably doesn't let you eat of any of these trees." Then secondly, "He's a liar." And then thirdly, he adds to that, he says, he gives the reason, "The reason He doesn't want you to eat of that is for He knows in the day you eat of it, you will be like God knowing good and evil." In other words, "God has withheld that from you because He doesn't want you to be all that you can be. He's holding you down. He's oppressing and suppressing you. That's who God is." That's what Satan's saying and she believed that bald-faced lie. Against all the evidence. Look at his goodness. Look what he's showered us with. He walks with us every day. He's given us everything our hearts desire. She believed the lie. And that lie is the same lie that is being trumpeted day after day in the world and it's what's a part of our sinful hearts. That's what the essence of sin is, really a disbelief in the goodness of God.

So our message to the world is God really is good. We're to proclaim his excellency. This idea of proclaim, in verse 9, "to proclaim the excellencies," the NIV says "declare," King James says "show forth." It really is a strong word. It means "to declare abroad; to make widely known." It's a word which connotes authority, the authoritative pronouncement of the king, but it means to announce out, to get the message out, to tell, declare. So even though this is a message the world doesn't want to hear, it's a message the world desperately needs to hear and God has said it's a message you and I must make known widely. Publish it. Declare it. So this is always our job, how can we tell other people about how good God is? Look for opportunities to make him known. This is our job.

Now let's unpack that word, "the excellencies." The New American Standard that I'm reading says "the excellencies." Other translations say "the praises." It's a rich word which means superiority. The superiority of God. The moral excellence of God. The virtue. The perfection. This word describes something that is exactly as it ought to be. No hint of imperfection. So we are to proclaim that God is everything he ought to be. That he is more wonderful than you can ever imagine because that's the reality, that's the truth.

Now he says you're to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. He wants us to think about his excellency in light, in particular light of this reality, that you were in darkness but you've been called into his marvelous light. Such a wonderful image, marvelous light. The idea of the word marvelous, it's an adjective, but it comes from a verb which means "to look at with great intentionality; to carefully consider; thoroughly examine," but all the time you're examining it, you are being filled increasingly with wonder. Do you see that? It's an intensity of focus and yet it's an emotional word laden with emotion, that you're looking at it and yet you're seeing how wonderful... you can't believe what you're seeing. That's what he's saying. It's light

that is so... to be in the light of God, this is marvelous light. We were in darkness but now we are in his light.

You know, you think about the man who was born blind that Jesus healed, John 9. Jesus says in John 8:12, the chapter before he heals the man, "I am the light of the world. He who believes in Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." Next chapter, John's orchestrated, laying out the gospel so beautifully. He's going to tell us about Jesus' healing of the man born blind. Imagine what it would be like to be born blind. You know, you close your eyes and you can sort of imagine what it's like to be blind but the problem is you and I have all the images of everything we've seen stored in our brain in our mind's eye. A person who's been born blind has no visual images in their brain. Think about that. Just darkness. And think about the day he met Jesus and he went from, he's a man, he's a grown man, remember, years, decades of total darkness instantly he sees. He sees the colors. People's clothing. He sees the colors. He sees the human form for the first time, the human face. He felt it. He heard the human voice but now he sees. What wonder must have filled that man's heart to have gone from darkness into this new marvelous light.

That's a little bit like the miracle of what it is to be saved. To be saved is far greater. To have been in spiritual darkness where you could not see God as he is, you could not see reality as it truly is spiritually, you were rejecting the truth and then to have God speak as 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, to speak into you and say, "Let there be light," and suddenly there is light in your soul. You who were born blind, you and I who were born blind, suddenly now we see. He says, reflect on that and realize how wonderful it is to see, to really understand now that the best way is to take what God says and walk in it, to submit to him. This is life. And all the joy that comes from turning from sin more and more and more and walking in holiness more and more and more by his grace. It's a continual battle. Yes it is. Day after day you have to fight but as you have learned to walk in the light and you have those glimpses where it becomes even clearer, isn't it precious? Isn't it marvelous? Tell other people about that. That's what we're called to do. We're called to make this known.

You know, the Old Testament imagery, I'm going to just mention it and I'm going to give you the homework of looking up Exodus 19 and Isaiah 43 this week as a part of just your devotional life, it would enrich to read these passages. I'm going to tell you the background. Exodus 19, they've just come out of Egypt and they are at Mount Sinai and they're about to be given the law, the covenant, the 10 Commandments, and God says to them, "If you will obey My commandments and walk in My ways, you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Now think about that. Where did they come from? They came out of Egypt. What was Egypt like? It was darkness. They were enslaved. They were under the bondage of the Egyptian just oppression. And not just, yeah, they were slaves, they were made to work, they were mistreated, but more than that, they were in a land of spiritual blackness. All of the Egyptian idolatry surrounding them. You know, have you ever been to a place where you can feel the evil? There have been places I've gone to where I can feel the evil oppression. People live in that. And there are people, before a person believes, they're a part of that in some way. But think about that, Egypt was that kind of place. You could feel it. The darkness was palpable. Then they're taken

out of darkness and they see the glory of God in the plagues, they are delivered. How are they delivered from darkness? By the blood of the Passover lamb. They're led out through the sea. They get water out of the rock, manna from heaven. God sustains them, he brings them to Sinai, he's going to give them their covenant and he says, "You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. I want to make through your existence, My relationship with you, I'm going to show the whole world My glory."

Isaiah 43 is very similar. Isaiah 43, this is when written much later, around 700 BC, Moses wrote, or the events that he's talking about, he wrote 1400 anyway, but it's 1445 BC. 700 years later, they're going to come back. He said Isaiah is telling them you're about to be taken into Babylonian captivity. The southern kingdom was carted off by Babylon and taken out of their land and they were made slaves again in Babylon, and he says God's going to bring you back. He's going to bring you back out of darkness. What amazing places of darkness, Egypt and Babylon, prototypical examples of spiritual wickedness and darkness. And in that passage he says, "I'm going to bring you back because you are My chosen race. You're My people for My own possession. So that you may declare the praises," that third phrase is used there too, in Isaiah 43, "that you may declare the praises of Him, of God," it doesn't say he called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, Peter adds that.

But think about that. They're in Babylonian captivity, they have to come across the desert. He tells in that passage he's going to make a way for them to come through the desert. He's going to make a highway in the desert. He's going to bring rivers in the desert. And so what he's saying is, "You're going to come from being far away from God in the land of darkness, you're going to come straight back to Jerusalem." Now, in that time what it meant is you're going to come back to the place of God's presence, because the only place you could meet with God at that point in history and truly be in his presence was in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount. You're going to go from being way out there in darkness, a thousand miles away, you're going to come through the desert, I'm going to supply rivers to you in the desert, I'm going to give you water in the desert, you're going to come through the desert back to my presence. He uses all of that imagery to say, "Listen, this is what God has done for you. You used to be in Babylon, and the only way He could get you out of Babylon or Egypt was to work in your life in ways that at first glance were hard." Maybe you suffered a lot. He lets you see the ugliness of sin. He gave you glimpses into it and your misery grew. And the path back to... Now, Jerusalem typifies for us, Christ. We're coming from being outside now to Jesus, the place of presence. How does it happen? God does amazing things to get people saved. And part of your message is to tell people how God did that. God did things that seemed hard at the time, but in reality they were exactly what I needed. God did things that other people would look at and say, "Why is God allowing that to happen?" Just like, why is God putting those people in Babylon? Why does he put a desert between them? Because God knows that he needs to put us in places where we have no other choice than to trust in his complete power and work.

So he does that and, listen, the rest of your Christian life, if you know Christ, God has a way of still putting into our lives circumstances and difficulties and trials that we never wanted, we never asked for, but he does that not capriciously, not carelessly, he does that

so that you and I will to see how much we need him and how he wants us to draw into closer intimacy with him because he knows the one thing you and I need is to sit in his presence and understand his sufficiency. He's everything that we need. You read through the Old Testament, God has a way, he puts Abraham in a situation that is hard and then he delivers him so that Abraham knows more about God and knows who God is and loves God. And he puts him in another situation that's hard and he delivers him and Abraham loves God even more. Now listen, God's not doing that for his own, he's doing that for us. He made us for him. We're wired. We need him more than anything else. And so the Christian life is going through adversity and difficulty and learning to run to the cross and then praising God for the gift of having to run to the cross. And then you say, "He is everything that he should be. His ways are not our ways, no they're not. His ways are perfect. He does all things well." And that's our message that we take to a dying world every day. "Listen, you've been sold a bill of goods. You believe God is not good. I'm here to tell you, God is everything He should be. Look at Jesus. He's proved it."

You and I need to know who we are. You are chosen. You are a priesthood of dignity and royalty. You're a holy nation. You're a people that belong to God, are treasured by God. You're the recipients of mercy. You've experienced his goodness, his excellency, and you're to make him known. That's the privilege that we have in this dark world to shine the light, to let other people see his glory, and even if they hate us for it, our God is pleased. And when you're doing it, do it as love to him. "Lord, I want to tell them about You because I love You and I want to make You known." When you do that, you'll be surprised how many times that person goes from being the enemy of God to one who bows the knee to Jesus Christ and loves him right alongside you. And the Lord help us be faithful. No matter what comes, this is our calling. Isn't it wonderful to know nothing can change that? You are who God says you are no matter what the world says about you, no matter what happens to you tomorrow, you are who God says you are, and you can do what God has called you to do no matter whether you have the job or you lose the job, no matter whether you have health or you don't have health, no matter whether you're in prison, no matter where you are, you can proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light until he calls us home.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we praise and honor You. You are so good. Your mercy amazes us. Your love and compassion. God, we pray that everyone hearing this message would stop believing the lie, truly surrender to One who is so good, so worthy, trust in Jesus fully who pay for their sins to give them His righteousness, and to make us holy, and to make us Your treasured possession. Lord, if You love us, if You're for us, who's against us? Make us content more and more and more in Christ. May we every day say more and more that He is the wisdom of God and the power of God. He is our greatest treasure. And may You be glorified in us as we do. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.