

The Mystery Revealed



1 Peter 2:9–10

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Have any of you ever seen someone, maybe at a distance, only to realize who you thought they were really wasn't who they were? From a distance, you couldn't tell them apart. Friday, Celisa called me and she said, "Are you in the tractor?" I said, "No I'm in the house," and immediately I said, "Are you at the shop?" She said, "Yes," and before I could say anything else, she said, "I can't tell the difference between you and Kory. I couldn't tell if it's you in the tractor or if it was Kory in the tractor." Now, I've got to be honest with you...wow! I took that as a compliment (since I'm twenty-two years older than him) that his mother thought we resembled each other, to the point that she could not tell which one of us was in the tractor.

This morning, we're going to read a passage of Scripture that some people in our church families worldwide don't recognize who it's talking about. So we're going to try to get up close because it's really important we understand who Peter is talking about. We're going to start with verse 9 and finish with verse 10. It's an amazing passage. As we're reading this, it's going to remind you of somebody, so in your mind I just want you to ask yourself who is this speaking about.

Scripture

"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. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

If you have the advantage that I have had and you were raised in a Bible believing church, when you read this passage, your mind probably does what my mind does—it goes back to the Old Testament, particularly to Exodus chapter 19, verses 5 and 6. Now, let me give you the context. God has brought Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. They are now on a mountain called Sinai and He's getting ready to establish a covenant relationship with this group of people that He's brought out of Egypt who are descendants from Abraham. Here is what He tells Moses to tell the people, "'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine...' Is that exciting or is that exciting? "...and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." Wow. I want you look at this...three of the four descriptions that Peter uses to talk about these elect exiles scattered throughout the Roman Empire are found in this passage. Look at this: "Now therefore, (in other words, based on what I've done in bringing you out of Egypt) if you will indeed (two things) obey my voice and keep my covenant..." then He tells them what's going to happen to them. What's going to happen to them? They will be a treasured possession of His among all the peoples of the earth, and He reminds this group of people that the whole earth is His. Then He says they will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to Him. Do you hear the language? It's conditional. They're only going to be His treasured possession, only going to be a kingdom of priests, and only going to be a holy nation if they obey His voice and keep His covenant. Peter, no doubt, had that passage in mind when he's writing to these elect exiles.

Now, let's turn to Isaiah 43, verses 20 and 21 quickly. Again, God is re-establishing the route of the exodus in Isaiah 43. He's talking about how He's preparing the way through the wilderness for them to get to the Promised Land, and He says, "The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise." So when we add this thought to Exodus 19, we can see that Peter, being Jewish, takes the book of Exodus and Isaiah's prophecies, puts them together, and almost verbatim uses these descriptions to speak of the elect exiles who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Why would Peter do that?

Let's look at Deuteronomy. I love Deuteronomy chapter 7. Now, you know the book of Deuteronomy is considered the second giving of the law, because remember that first generation didn't go in. Forty years have passed now and they're getting ready to go in, so the book of Deuteronomy is years later and Moses is reminding them of the covenant relationship they have with God. Look at what Deuteronomy chapter 7:6–9 says, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 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 and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations..." Now let's go to verse 12, "And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that He swore to your fathers." When we read this, there is no doubt in our minds that God shares with Israel that He is a covenant keeping God and He will keep His part of the Covenant. The question is will they keep their part? The only way they're going to be His treasured possession, a kingdom of

priests, a holy nation, a chosen people is if they keep their part of the covenant.

Why is God doing what He's doing in their lives? This passage says for two reasons—one is because He loves them, and He didn't have a reason for loving them. I mean, there wasn't a reason in them for Him to love them; His reason for loving them was in Himself. Secondly, He said I'm going to keep the covenant I made with your fathers. You know who that's talking about; it's talking about Abraham. Now, I want to watch something here. Did Israel ever keep their part of the covenant? No. So, are they God's treasured possession? Are they God's kingdom of priests? Are they a holy nation to God? Are they His chosen people? No...because the covenant relationship He made with them was based on them keeping the covenant and they never kept it. Whoa! So why did He keep doing what He did with them? Because He made a promise to Abraham. What was His promise to Abraham? That in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Who does Paul tell us in the book of Galatians the Seed of Abraham is? It's Jesus. Let's connect the dots. At Mount Sinai, God took the descendants of Abraham and made a conditional covenant with them because He had an unconditional covenant with Abraham. He never said to Abraham, *if you...I will*. Or, *if you...here's what will happen*. He just told him—in your seed, all the nations of earth are going to be blessed. That's Jesus. So to fulfill His unconditional covenant to Abraham to bring forth the Messiah who's going to bless all the nations of the earth, He gathered the physical descendants of Abraham together and formed them in a nation so that when the Messiah was born we know exactly who He was, when He would be born, where He would be born, and there would be no mistake in the eyes of the world who God's Son and Messiah really is.

And then Jesus came, and He came first to who the lost house of Israel. What did the lost house of Israel do? They rejected Him. Paul, even writing a church at Rome, says that salvation is to the Jew first and then also to who the Gentiles. Now watch this. Why did Jesus come? He came to bless all the families of the earth. Paul takes that thought and writes a letter to the church at Ephesus. And in the second chapter of Ephesians, he talks about how the church at Ephesus was dead in trespasses and sin. They

followed the course of the world and they were under the influence of Satan, and Satan was still working in the sons of disobedience. And then, he says there's been a change in their life. Why? Because God, who is rich in mercy, made them alive with Christ, raised them up with Christ, and seated them in the heavenlies with Christ. And then he says in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God..." Amen! Then he talks about how we are God's workmanship; we are His work of art. And then, he says but there was a time when you were far away and not near. And God took those people who were far away (you) and those people who were near (Jews), and He put His Son Jesus on a cross, and on that cross Jesus died to break down the wall of hostility between them so that He could create one new body, one new race of people, and that race of people is the church. He calls us the church, and he talks about how we Gentiles have been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and Jesus being the Chief Cornerstone. He talks about how God is building us into this temple of the Lord where the Holy Spirit is going to dwell.

Then we have chapter 3. I want you to let what Paul is going to say sink in because this is setting us up for 1st Peter chapter 2 verse 9. In chapter 3, Paul is calling this church idea of Jews and Gentiles being together a mystery. He says, "...how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. (He is talking about what he's just written) When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." He's saying they didn't get it! Do you hear what Paul is saying? Paul is saying what I just wrote about briefly, I'm the first one to tell you this because no one up until now knew about this! Even those people—Malachi, Hosea, Zachariah, Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Samuel, all the way back to Moses—none of them got it, none of them knew! Knew what? That God didn't raise up Israel as a nation to bring salvation to the world; God raised up Israel to bring forth the Messiah and the Messiah would bring salvation to the world. And when He brought salvation to the world,

God would take the Gentile with the Jew, put them together, and create a new identity, and that new identity is the Church of Jesus Christ, the temple of God where the Holy Spirit of God dwells! Glory to God! Now, he didn't say I'm the only one knows this; he said me and the holy apostles. Who was one of the apostles? Peter. Peter knew about the mystery. He knew the mystery had been fulfilled. He knew the mystery had been revealed. What was the mystery? It is what God was going to do with Israel—bring forth the Messiah and create a new race, a new body, a new church.

Now watch this. When we go to 1st Peter chapter 2 verse 9, there is no conditional language. There is no *now therefore*, or *if indeed you obey God's voice and keep His commandments or keep His covenant*. What does Peter say? "But you are..." and he lists four things. They are chosen race; they are a royal priesthood; they are a holy nation; they are a people for God's possession. It's not conditional; it's unconditional. Do you know who this is speaking about? This is not speaking about Israel and it's not speaking about Jewish people who come to faith in Jesus, it is speaking about you and me—people from Hardin, Kentucky; Puryear, Tennessee; Wadesboro folks; those on the other side of the tracks in Murray; and yes, even you from Benton. Who are we now? We're a chosen race. We are royal priesthood. We are a holy nation. We are a people for His possession! Hear me say this...the church does not replace Israel; the church fulfills Israel. That's us. So don't read these words and think it's talking about the nation of Israel. Don't read these words and think this is talking about the Jewish believers who believe in Jesus, the remnant of Israel. No. It's about you and I, Jews and Gentiles together—we make up the temple, a spiritual house, and God has a purpose for us. What is God's purpose for us? Based on our identity, it's that we "may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." I want to make sure you see that it's unconditional language, because our salvation is not based on a conditional covenant. Our salvation is based on the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and you are evidence that it's been fulfilled, who you now are and what you now do. So please remember this, *but you are...that you may*. You don't do these things to become; you do these things because you are. Behavior

expresses identity and identity determines behavior, and Peter just won't quit reminding us of who we are.

But now, Peter goes to great lengths to identify us as the covenant people of God with four statements. First, we are a chosen race. If you let me stay until the first Sunday of May, I will have been your pastor for forty years. In all of the years of my preaching, I don't ever believe there's been a time where I've stood before a congregation to talk about race and realized that at least five or six times this week I've read articles online about race. It was not because I was preaching about race, but because so many talk about race. We're enamored with race in our culture. It seems like everybody's a racist. Do you understand race? According to the experts, race is determined by your birth. Race is biological. Race means you have certain traits and the reason you have certain traits like skin color, hair, and other certain things is because it goes back to a descendant, where you descended from. And here, Peter takes this term to talk about us. When God chose Israel, He chose them based on them being descendants of Abraham. So they had some of Abraham's physical DNA in them and that DNA determined certain physical characteristics about them. Here's what this is teaching about you and I—if you are part of the church you are a new race of people, and who you are is not determined by your physical birth and who your physical daddy or great granddaddy is, your identity is determined by your spiritual DNA. Where a Jewish person can trace their DNA back to Abraham and be Jewish, we are the church because our spiritual DNA (what determines who we are) traces back to our Father, God. Has this dawned on you? My dad is God! And I'm not an only child, and neither is Jesus. He's got a big family. That's you and me.

Now, Peter will not let us just believe we are a new race, he says we're a chosen race. Following in the spirit of what he's been talking about in the first chapter, he lets us know we are this new person in Christ. We are part of the church because of God's choice. He doesn't call us the chooser race; he calls us the chosen race. God made a choice of us. I think in choosing us it was similar to why He chose Israel. It wasn't anything He saw in us; His choice reveals Him and who He is. It was a love that He had that caused Him to love you, and because He loved you, you chose to love Him.

I read a great comment this week in one of my commentaries. There's a guy that I always check myself out with, and this guy said when it comes to election and choosing, sometimes that study brings up questions because we do not understand. He said at other times it doesn't bring up questions because we do not understand it; it brings up hatred because we do understand it. You get that, don't you? There are people who hate the thought that my salvation lies in a holy, holy, holy God, and that my choice of Him reflects His choice of me. They hate it. Guys, we can't get around it. Peter says we are elect according to the fore-choosing of God, the foreknowing of God, and now he tells us that we are a race who has been chosen.

We're not only a chosen race; Peter says we're a royal priesthood. We could spend two or three weeks on priesthood, but let's go to the main thought of being a priest. Now, let's remember we're the Gentiles. So we are hearing this, knowing that in the Old Testament era this spoke about Israel, but now we're included. And we have to remember that even though God said if they kept the covenant they were all going to be a kingdom of priests, and now Israel will build a tabernacle where God's presence is going to dwell, but before they get that thing built they set aside a tribe, the tribe of Levi, to minister in the presence of God and be Israel's priests. Then they built the tabernacle that had those tents—it had an outer Courtyard and inner Courtyard, and it had the Holy Place, which was divided in two by the Holy of Holies with a curtain.

Now get this picture. I'm going to be personal here; I'm just going to tell you like it was—the reason those Israelites are in our (Gentile) land is because their God gave our land to them and said we had been so abusing the land that we needed to be driven out and now they needed to take possession of our land—but it was our land at first. Can you imagine that? Having your land and somebody coming in driving you out taking over your land? Well, Israel didn't drive all of us out, some of us hung around. And then they built this tabernacle, but me and you are Gentiles and we walk by the tabernacle and we can't go in! We have to stay on the outside while we watch those who have just taken over our land go inside and worship this God who gave our land to them! But then we understand that God

doesn't dwell in the part where they all go in; He just dwells in this one part, this Holy Place, this Holy of Holies. Well, guess what? All of them can't go in there either, only the people who descend from the tribe of Levi. And, only *one* of them who descends from the family of Aaron can go into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant is. But when he goes in, he can't go in by himself; he's got to take blood with Him because God is holy, holy, holy. I don't know about you, but I just kind of believe if I had been in Israel at this time, I would have wanted to be of the family of Levi because the family of Levi got to go in closer to God than anybody else. If you weren't of the tribe of Levi, you had to depend on them to tell you about God. And if you want to give God something you, couldn't take it into God's presence yourself, you had to hand it to them and let them do it! So, here's the thought of being a priest—you minister in the presence of God. That's who we are. We're priests...we are priests. We Gentiles, who used to not be able to go in, now we go in, and because that veil was torn, we go into the very presence of God and we fellowship with Him who is holy, holy, holy! Not once a year...every day of our lives, as much of the day as we want to, we minister in the presence of God!

That is you and me—we're a royal priesthood. Royal! I'm sorry...we're Americans; we rebelled against all that stuff, didn't we? Yeah, you rebelled against the king of England and all that stuff. We came over and started our own country where there's no royalty, we're just all common, ordinary people. Now come on...some of us still at royalty, don't we? We still have to read about the queen, still like to read about the king. We like to go over there and pay our money to fly over there and visit castles because there is something inside us that is fascinated with royalty. I got a first-hand look at this right after I married Celisa. She has always been into royalty. She knows English history better than anybody I know. Right after we got married, there was a royal wedding that took place, and I'll never forget it. We were in our little 14 by 70 mobile home and that wedding started really, really early in the morning, I think like two or three o'clock in the morning. When I finally woke up about 5:30, she was glued to the TV. Now, this was in the day of channels three, six, and twelve and you had to have the antenna just right, and we had it just right. She was glued and she didn't know I was up. By the time I got up, Lady Di starts coming into

this building and she had pages carrying her dress. Celisa was still glued to the TV and I didn't know what was going through her mind, but I imagined what was going through her mind. So I broke into her thought life and I just said these words, "You know how she feels." Before she could react, she looks at me and I said, "Yes, you know how she feels. You married a prince, too!" And I reminded her who my daddy was. Do I need to remind you all who my daddy is? My daddy is God, sovereign Lord of the universe, King of kings, Lord of Lord's—I am a Son of God, therefore I am a royal person! You are royal. You are kin to God. You're a Son of God! You are not common, you're not ordinary; this is a royal priesthood. We get to minister in the presence of our dad, who is God.

Peter says we're a holy nation. Now, this word, nation, is where we get our English word, ethnicity from see there's a difference in race and ethnicity. Race is biological; ethnicity is cultural. Ethnicity is those things that come out of us because of who we are that express ourselves as we live together and belong together. There are just certain things about us that we all agree and share in. Let me give an example. I think most of us realize that predominantly, if we went to Europe, that Europeans are a certain race of people. But don't tell an English person they're like an Italian, and don't tell an Italian they're like a German. No. They are the same race but different ethnicity. Listen to me. The church is a holy nation. It's not just you, it's not just me, and it's not just Hardin. This nation is not a place, geographically, like the United States or Russia or China or Ukraine or Canada or Mexico or Brazil or Argentina. No. We are a nation of God that's holy, that's been set apart within the nations of the world. So the American church may look a little differently than the African church or the Brazilian church, but that's ok. Here is what should distinguish us—within each culture, we should have a culture that expresses we're different.

Excuse me, because I'm going to make some of you mad, but we're not Americans first; we're Christians! And as Christians, we should be set apart, we should be holy, and we should be different. We're not driven by a self-centered approach to life; we are driven by a God-centered approach to life. This is who we are! We're a people...this word, people, is usually translated multitude. There's a bunch of us! I learned this growing up in

the Bogard family because there is just a bunch of us. And hear me say this—there's a bunch of us! Do you know why there's a bunch of us? It's because of how big our God is. He's holy, holy, holy. The universe can't contain Him. He's not in time only, He's outside of time, and while He's outside of time, He's inside a time, at the same time.

God chose us to possess us. 'To possess us' comes from a word that literally means to purchase, to buy. We are His possession because He purchased us. In a capitalistic way of life, mean, you pay more for certain things, and you pay more for it because you believe it's more valuable. If you didn't believe it was more valuable, you wouldn't pay the money you paid for it. Have you ever thought about how valuable you are to God? Do know how valuable you are to Him? He put His Son on a cross and He laid his life down so that He could take His blood into God's presence and pay our sin debt while we were sinners. Sinners! He knew once He purchased us He was going to transform us from a sinner to a saint, and we are His treasured possession.

Why? Why these four statements? So "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." That is your DNA, that is your nature. This is why in the next verse he says remember you used to not be a people, but now you're God's people. You used to didn't have mercy, but now you've received mercy. So based on the fact that we know who we used to be and who we now are, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, we proclaim. We open our mouth and we tell about God. Why do we talk about God? Because we are a priest. Where do we talk about God? At home, at work, at our place of recreation, in the relationships that we have. Here's my question. Are you a proclaimer? Or, are you just going about your business enjoying God but you're never telling anybody about God? This week, let's proclaim who He is in our home, in our workplace, in the places we recreate—let's reveal who we are.