

"Guest Speaker" Taylor Hollingsworth

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

I want to go ahead and just invite you to start turning to our passage today, which we'll come to in a little bit, but it is going to be 1 Peter chapter 2. So you can begin moving that direction.

And if you're our guest this morning, you may be wondering, where did Walt go? Who is this guy and why in the world is he here? Which is a great question. Walt alluded to this, but one way that we can answer that question, I could say in short, my name is Taylor and I am a grateful member of this church family.

Walt asked me if I considered opening God's word with you this morning. So I count it an immense honor, a huge privilege to be able to open this text together and ask the Lord to encourage our hearts.

So that's one way that I could answer that question of who I am and why I'm here. In fact, it's a really worthwhile question. And I actually want to flip it back to you. Who are you and why in the world are you here?

[1 : 18] When I'm asking this, I'm not just talking about this gathering right here right now, although this is definitely included in the question. But I mean even more broadly, who are we and why in the world are we here?

So maybe you're frustrated with a job that feels like drudgery. And you wonder what the purpose is for your work. Maybe you are a mom struggling.

You're struggling to survive what feels like another fruitless day of tantrums and diapers and thanklessness. I was waiting for some amens from these moms out there. Perhaps you've been shaken by the fallout of the coronavirus and you're wondering what God is up to.

Maybe your work plans, vacation plans, school plans, they've all been totally redirected. Maybe your finances have taken a hit and you're trying to make sense of why God is letting this happen. Maybe you feel scattered, isolated, confused, or disoriented. How do you make sense of why you are in the world? Well, earlier in my life, I think I would have tried to answer that question this way.

[2 : 24] To be a Christian in the world is basically a big series of tests to prove to God by my good behavior that I'm serious about my faith. That I'm genuine in my commitment to him.

When I sing Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. I mean, yeah, he did pay it all. But now I need to make good on that loan and start paying him back. Right? I've got about an 80-year mortgage on my heavenly mansion.

And if I read my Bible this morning, I resist yelling at my kids, and I don't outwardly express road rage, then it's like knocking a few bucks off that mortgage payment. Right?

I'm kind of kidding, but I'm kind of not. That's basically how I was attempting to make sense of my life and my circumstances. But the Bible teaches us that our good deeds don't make us right before God.

We are saved by grace alone. He's saying about it. Only Jesus makes us right before God. So if that's the case for a Christian, then who are we and why in the world are we still here?

[3 : 25] If not to prove ourselves or earn a little extra favor by our works or to start paying back the loan, then why in the world are we still here?

Why didn't God, the moment that we became Christians, just beam us up to heaven? You ever wonder that? Why did he leave us here in the world after receiving the gift of salvation with the financial issues, the diapers, the tantrums, the isolation, the disappointments?

Who are we and why in the world are we here? Well, our text today is meant to help answer this question. So read with me 1 Peter 2, 9 through 10.

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 and 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. A little context for you.

[4 : 32] The apostle Peter is addressing persecuted believers trying to be faithful in a hostile culture. Put it simply, Christians were seen as outsiders in every possible way.

They worshiped one God in a culture that worshiped many gods. They were viewed as unpatriotic because they refused to worship the emperor. They were viewed as disloyal to the city because they did not participate in pagan ceremonies.

They were viewed as poor professionals because they abstained from the guilds that participated in pagan worship. They were viewed as haters of their families because they refused to worship ancestors. And they were viewed as a threat to progress.

Any way you looked at these guys, Christians did not fit. As a result, they were met with daily persecution, both socially and physically. Following Jesus meant risking not getting a job.

Not being able to support a family, not being able to get a fair price in the market. It meant others would exploit, slander, ridicule, and abuse them and their family members. Because of their allegiance to Jesus, they were living as exiles.

[5 : 34] And it was to this shaken and vulnerable group that this letter was written. In fact, it was probably written just for a bunch of waves of persecution. And as you can imagine, these believers struggled with our question.

Why in the world are we here? Being rejected and uncomfortable gets real old real fast. Right? So it would have been very tempting to disaffect, to just kind of blend in with one of the more culturally acceptable groups.

It would have been easy to become embittered and throw it all away. That is, of course, if the main purpose of their salvation was to be more comfortable in this life as believers.

You see, if these believers did not get biblical clarity on that question, why in the world are we here? It would be difficult to navigate the foggy moments in this life. However, our text today is what God, in his mercy, provided this struggling church to sustain their souls.

And God provided it for us today to give us clarity on the question, why are we here and who are we? The answer comes in three parts. As Peter reveals, our former state, our new identity, and our purpose in life.

[6 : 44] But we can more easily remember this movement in the main point of our message by phrasing it this way. The main point is, we are former rebels redeemed to rebel.

We are former rebels redeemed to rebel. So let's begin with former rebels. My grandma Winnie, she makes the best yeast rolls in the world. I'll fight anyone that wants to object.

Growing up, every time we went to grandma's house, we couldn't wait to get those rolls slathered with some butter in her homemade pear honey preserves. Delicious. It was absolutely delicious.

But even more importantly are the memories that were tied to those smells and those tastes.

Even to this day, a smell can trigger memories of laughter and fun at grandma's house. Lyrics to songs can be kind of like that as well. Maybe your family has a catchphrase or a trigger that shoots you over to a song and you all start singing it together.

And those things are attached to memories. But let's be real. Those memories ain't all hot rolls and happy days, are they? Sometimes these foods and phrases trigger the sad or the tragic in our lives.

[7 : 50] Well, Peter addresses these believers with phrases that come packed with triggers from their bitter history. Imagine if we're sitting in the congregation that got this letter from Peter.

We're experiencing the pain of displacement and the fear of persecution. We're risking our lives to be together and have our feeble faith strengthened. The letter's being read aloud and we hear the words of verse 10.

Once you were not a people. Once you had not received mercy. Those words would immediately trigger a vivid memory from our past, our history, Hosea.

The prophet Hosea was commanded by God to marry a harlot named Gomer. Gomer to be an explicit living demonstration of God's relation to his unfaithful people, Israel.

Gomer's ongoing infidelity was a heart-wrenching display of Israel abandoning God to find satisfaction in idols. Not only was Israel shattering a covenant, they were rejecting the only true

source of love and relational intimacy.

[8 : 55] Gomer had children whose names symbolized God's righteous judgment against the bitter fruit of their infidelity. One child was named No Mercy.

That was really the name. And another was named Not My People. Those names certainly triggered memories in the minds of Peter's listeners. Maybe even bitter memories of their own unfaithfulness.

Yet, the story of Hosea continues with the promise that someday God would take the initiative to reverse judgment. In Hosea chapter 3, God gives a glimpse of his scandalous love for his unfaithful people through Hosea's pursuit of Gomer.

The infidelity that Gomer thought was a form of fulfilling freedom eventually led her to become a sex slave. She had shattered her marriage covenant repeatedly, and anyone in their right mind, including us here, would probably agree that Gomer was getting exactly what she deserved.

And when she had reached the end and was as good as dead, God spoke. Hosea, buy her back.

[10 : 04] Buy her back. And don't just buy her back to be a slave, but love her again as a wife, so that my people will have a picture of what I'm like.

So Hosea went into the shadows, and he found the enslaved Gomer, broken and humiliated. Then Hosea, the forsaken husband, looked into the eyes of the slave owner, and he extended the full price from his own wealth to buy back this woman that was rightfully his from the start.

Though he paid the price for a slave, she came home as a loved bride. So why would Peter draw our attention, the attention of this scattered and scared church, to this memory of bringing up the children?

No mercy and not my people. Weren't these the children that were meant to be a living picture of Israel's infidelity? Weren't these children that picture of unfaithfulness?

Well, that's not the end of this story. God brings no mercy and not my people to the forefront in Hosea 2 in order to paint a picture of a future promise of how he would deal with his people.

[11 : 13] Here's the text from Hosea 2. And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me my husband, and no longer will you call me my Baal. For I will remove the names of the Baal from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.

And I will betroth you to me forever. And I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. And I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on no mercy. And I will say to not my people, you are my people. And he shall say, you are my God.

So though Hosea was looking forward to that day, Peter was urging the church to look back to the glorious fulfillment of that day. Romans 9, I think we have this for you up there.

Peter 9, 23 through 26, clarifies that God accomplished his promise to redeem his people from the slavery of infidelity through Jesus Christ. And the promise is not only for Jews, but for all those who trust in him.

[12 : 16] In order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, there it is, which he has prepared beforehand for glory. Even us, whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles.

As indeed, it says in Hosea, those who are not my people, I will call my people. And her who is not beloved, I will call beloved. And in the same place where it was said to them, you are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God.

So Peter is directly applying those names of these transformed children to the believers hearing this letter. 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. So this verse is not only for Peter's struggling listeners, but if you are a follower of Jesus Christ this morning, this verse captures our story too.

We share the bitter memory of Israel's unfaithfulness in our own lives. Though we were not worshipping Baal, we bowed to the idol of busyness. We placed our hope in things that promised satisfaction, but only left us starving.

[13 : 24] Like Gomer, we made a prideful practice of spitting in the face of the one who had been faithful. We hoard after relationships, food, approval, pleasure, money, reputation, power, revenge, sex, and peace of mind without God.

What we thought was our sweet freedom became our bitter slavery. We were rebels against the righteous one, and like Gomer, we were dead and without hope. The right judgment against the bitter fruit of our unfaithfulness, no mercy.

not my people. Peter knows that the starting place of encouragement for struggling believers does not begin with bursting bank accounts, but with a bitter memory of life lived in rebellion against the faithful God.

But his goal is not to leave us there. If the first part of the verse is true for us, then we must read on to see the whole truth. We were deserving of the names of the people, and we were destined for death.

But then God spoke. I will buy her back. Like Hosea God, the faithful husband broke into the shadows of this world, looked into the eyes of your slave owner, greed, lust, anger, hate, and he extended the full price, the price of Christ's perfect blood, to redeem what was rightfully his from the start.

[14:47] While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And though God paid the price for a slave, he brought us home to be loved as a bride.

So in order to understand who we are and why we're in the world, we have to look back to see that we were former rebels, but we have been redeemed.

Our second point is redeemed. So verse 10 takes us back to who we once were in our rebellion. The beginning of verse 9 casts light on who we are now.

What does it mean that we're redeemed? Well, verse 9 starts with the words, but you are, and it's meant to be a contrast to those who do not put their hope in Jesus.

These are those that are still rebels, but you, former rebels who are now redeemed, you are this. So who are we? It's undeniable that we're a people that deeply longs to have this question answered, and I can point to at least one simple objective indicator that that's true.

[15:55] Ancestry.com. Right? Ancestry.com is a company that provides DNA testing, and for a basic package starting at about 99 bucks, they mail you a kit, you spit in it, and then you mail it back.

Right? In six to eight weeks, the results are made available to you online. In 2017, Ancestry.com had a market value of three billion dollars. In 2018, they reported over 10 billion digitized records and three million paying customers.

Incredible. So what's the product they're selling? The test is not the product. It's a means to the product. Right? I know that because I can spit on the ground for free.

Right? And if you want some spit in a pre-stamped envelope, let me know. I can do a lot cheaper than 99 dollars. Right? No, the product is the information. Right? On the website, the question is posed, what will my results tell me?

The answer, this is what's on the website, information about your geographic origins and your potential relatives. So the site is just laced with all sorts of stories finding out, you know, how and why your family moved from one place to another and the times of those things.

[17:11] And one prompt simply says, connect with your people in new ways. And it offers a button that you can click to begin finding your nearest living relatives. Pretty incredible. Billions and billions of dollars speak to the desire to know where did I come from and who am I connected to?

I think it's pretty fascinating myself. I don't know about you. And the results really do get a little bit at our question that we're asking. Who am I and why am I here? But at a biological and a geographical level.

So our God-given biological heritage is spectacular. It really is. We are a tapestry of different ethnicities and national origins representing God's creative work. That's so true.

But this identity is not ultimate. If attempted to answer our question who am I and why am I here with an ethnic or a national lens as our ultimate way to view and interact with the world we will soon find ourselves fragmented and acting in devastating ways that actually oppose God.

That may sound kind of intense to you but let me explain what I mean here. If I wanted to describe to you who I am I could use many descriptions that are true but they shouldn't necessarily be ultimate.

[18:25] If I use ancestry.com categories and I define myself ethnically I could say I'm primarily Welsh or German. Or if I'm speaking of my national identity I could say I'm American.

Those things are true but they are not ultimate. As soon as I begin to define myself in those ways I'm also defining who I am not.

If I'm an American then I'm not Afghan Algerian or Argentinian. So these categories give us a way of understanding who we are and who we're not who we're connected to and who we are not connected to where our allegiances lie and where they don't lie what we will stand for and what we will not stand for.

And there are implications to our associations. If biological heritage or national identity are at the top of what guides our actions or our inactions we should take caution from historical movements like Nazi Germany, apartheid in South Africa, the Rwandan genocide between the Hutus and the Tutsis or even closer to home slavery and Jim Crow.

There are implications to our associations. Ethnic and national identity provide some true categories for us but they are not intended to be our ultimate guide to understand who we are and why in the world we are here.

[19 : 48] But if Ancestry.com is any indication of our eagerness to learn about the truths of our earthbound biological identity let me have the privilege of highlighting what the Bible presents as the primary ultimate truth about who you are.

Your eternal spiritual identity. Lean in as God gives his authoritative word about who you are and who you're connected to. Verse 9 says but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession.

These words are kind of unfamiliar to us but Peter's heroes would have been transported in their minds back to Mount Sinai in a moment. The people in the base camp were eagerly awaiting to hear from Moses to return with a word from their God the one who had just freed them.

Only a few days earlier this people they were slaves living under the oppressive rule of the Egyptians the most powerful kingdom in the known world and for 400 years their people had been living as exiles in a land that was not their own.

They had grown weary of waiting on God. They wondered if God even remembered them. He did. And the instrument God picked to accomplish his plan a stuttering murderer who fled Egypt after committing his crime in order to hide out in the wilderness.

[21 : 17] God chose Moses as his spokesman and then God systematically humbled every false god and prideful power by bringing Egypt to its knees before a watching world.

God acted and the slaves walked out of the national superpower of Egypt in order to follow God the cosmic superpower into the unknown. After leaving the Egyptians decided to hunt down and exact their revenge.

And soon God's people were sandwiched between their fast approaching bloodthirsty oppressors and a vast impassable sea. The men the women the children just like you and me who had just walked out of slavery began to feel that their miraculous march was only leading to a more gruesome end.

You ever felt like that? Saved only to die a different way? And when there was no hope God acted. He performed the impossible and he parted the water.

All of his people walked across dry land while their oppressors were met with judgment. And now here they were eagerly waiting at the base of Mount Sinai to hear from God through his prophet Moses.

[22 : 34] Exodus 19 4-8 records the message Moses delivered to the people from God. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples for all the earth is mine 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. So Moses came and called the elders of all the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said all that the Lord has spoken we will do. God made a covenant with these people. If you obey my voice and keep my covenant then you shall be treasured possession kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

And the people responded with what? We will do it! Right? This account was recorded in the second book of your Bible. What happened over the span of thousands of years until the time when Peter was applying the same titles of that covenant to the church?

[23 : 53] Is it right to say that from that moment on the mountain until Peter's pen hit the parchment the people upheld that covenant? If that were the case let me ask you something.

Why would we need Jesus? To sprinkle a little extra goodness on top of our own obedience? If the people at Mount Sinai have been able to do all that the Lord has spoken then Jesus' life, death, and resurrection would have been totally unnecessary and our Bible would have been a whole lot shorter.

The reality is that the people at Mount Sinai who said all that the Lord has spoken we will do found out that they could not do it. And this is the repeated cycle of each book after Exodus.

We can do it! Bam! Idolatry. We can do it! Bam! Idolatry. We can do it! Bam! Idolatry. The people were unable to keep the covenant and be faithful to God.

Though the people were freed from Egypt they were still slaves to sin. And people who could not keep the covenant could not receive the benefits of the covenant.

[25 : 08] But God took action. He wrapped himself in flesh and he obeyed the covenant perfectly. then on the night he was betrayed while seated with his disciples he took the bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and he gave it to them saying this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me and likewise the cup after they had eaten saying this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Jesus lived the life we could not live. And then he died the death that we should have died so that we might be freed from the slavery of sin and receive all the benefits of his perfect obedience.

This is the new covenant. This is how Peter could apply these wonderful titles to his hearers and why we can embrace them now. Anyone who is in Christ is a recipient of this identity because of his finished work.

So who are we? Our ultimate identity is wrapped up in God's work for us in Christ. We are a chosen race. For the Christian ethnicity is beautiful but not the ultimate form of distinction.

At the highest level there are only two kinds of people. Those who belong to Christ and those who do not belong to Christ. Galatians 3.28 says there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free.

[26 : 41] There is no male or female for you are all one in Christ. The point is not that being a Christian just breaks down all distinctions but that the most important distinction is belonging or not belonging to Christ.

We are a royal priesthood. For the Christian royalty highlights our direct connection to the highest power, the King of Kings, the ruler of heaven and earth.

people and as priests we have perpetual access to the presence of God and our very lives are sacrifices of spiritual worship. We're a holy nation for the Christian.

Being holy highlights that we have been set apart from the world for a specific purpose. And to be a nation means that we are bound together by a common governing force. We are intended to demonstrate the supernatural selflessness of God's kingdom.

We're a people for his own possession. For the Christian we are God's inheritance purchased by the blood of Christ. Though we were rebels deserving death he does not treat us as our sins deserve.

[27 : 48] He aims to spend eternity lavishing us with his love not because of anything in us but simply because he loves us. So what does this mean for us to be former rebels who have been redeemed?

What is the theme that animates our new and ultimate identity? Perhaps the best way to ask the question all along is not who am I but whose am I?

Because our ultimate identity is no longer independent and isolated it is totally absorbed in the proactive love of our rescuer and redeemer Jesus Christ.

Throughout our text the Lord has been drawn our attention over and over again to his faithfulness his power his loving pursuit so in the foggy moments of life when you feel disoriented and you wonder if the Lord even cares you can look back at God's people enslaved in Egypt and remember God redeemed you can look back at God's people hopelessly sandwiched between their oppressors and the sea and you can remember God redeems you can look back at the slavery to sin and the broken covenant and remember God redeems you can look back at the cross where new covenant blood was poured out for you and remember God redeems when we begin to get a picture of whose we are the thought of trying to pay God back with our good works begins to fade

away and is replaced with awe the experience of grace leads to amazement doesn't it in fact this is the proper response to redemption and is the very reason we are in the world former rebels are redeemed to rebel look at the verse that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous life your reason for existing in the world as a Christian would be absolute nonsense apart from first seeing that you are a former rebel who has been redeemed look at this verse the point of your life after being saved from sin is to proclaim the excellencies of him how can you proclaim his excellencies if you've never experienced him as excellent so revisiting our identity in Christ is actually vital to fulfilling our purpose in the world where would you be without the Lord what darkness would be killing you what did it feel like for you to enter into his marvelous light do you remember a few years ago we went on a trip to Pigeon Forge had the opportunity to visit Wonder Works some of you have been to Wonder Works probably for those who haven't it's basically an indoor amusement park with hands-on activities and science exhibits the last part we walked through at this place was filled with all sorts of these crazy cool optical illusions and most of them were pretty amazing but as we got towards the end we saw this big hunk of gnarled metal sitting on top of this platform and the first thought [31 : 16] I had when I saw this thing was I can't believe they wasted so much space for that hunk of trash modern art so I was getting ready to walk past this thing but then I realized there was this little button in front of the metal and when I pushed this button a light mounted a few feet away turned on and it shone directly onto this gnarled piece of metal and it cast this huge shadow on the wall behind it I had to do a double take because the shadow was of this place I kept thinking about the shadow map it was a really cool exhibit but what made it unforgettable for me is that it made me think about the Lord's kindness towards rebels apart from the Lord we made a big mess of our lives didn't we we were dead in our sins we were like that forgettable gnarled heap of garbage without hope but

God came for us not because we were worthy not not because of anything in us but because he is merciful and when the light of Christ breaks into the empty caverns of our souls his radiant! Redemption is on full display proclaiming his excellencies is what happens as an overflow of experiencing the light of the gospel in our brokenness so the beginning of proclaiming his excellencies for us is identifying the point of contact between his redemption and your brokenness make it a habit to study the evidence of his grace in your life how has he changed you how is he changing you where is he at work in your life your heart what good things has he given you what has he withheld and what is that revealing how is he disciplining you when you begin to see that he has not left you for dead but is continually enlivening you pursuing you and loving you each day you have on earth begins to burst with opportunities to revel in his goodness and to proclaim his excellency if proclaiming his excellencies is the reason we exist in the world as Christians our circumstances whether they are smooth or they are rough are transformed into a backdrop for praise think of the light hitting that gnarled piece of metal even if the backdrop changed the interplay of the light on the metal would still be displayed wouldn't it what I mean is that former rebels who are redeemed a rebel can do so in any circumstance you don't have to pretend that every circumstance is easy that's not what we're saying in fact it could be that pointing to God's goodness and fighting for faith in the difficult moments more clearly displaces excellencies! For instance what if the workplace shifts from a place of drudgery to a place where you demonstrate joyful work as a form of worship to the God who redeemed you? [34 : 49] What if you went above your normal duties struggling coworker finish his work and when he asks you why would you do this tell him that your God lifted your burden and so it's a joy to do the same what if the fight you have with your spouse becomes the training ground for you to humble yourself confess your sin and to ask for forgiveness because you've been forgiven a far greater debt by the Lord what if in the rain you ask the Lord to give you supernatural peace to trust him what if when people asked you how you're doing you responded that you are casting your anxieties to the Lord because you have hope and you know that he cares for you what if when your children disobey rather than lashing out at them in anger you see yourself in their disobedience and tell them of your struggle to what if when you experience good things in your life you refuse to pat yourself on the back but instead humbly tell others that

God has been unbelievably gracious to you once again proclaiming the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light is not something only for the professionals it is for every former rebel listening to these words today throughout McMinn County we can echo the

words of Peter in Acts 4:20 which say for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard let's be a people who revel in his redemption in every circumstance because it's the reason that we're still here let's pray together oh father you are gracious not because of anything in us simply because you love us and you redeemed us so lord i ask that you empower us by your spirit to live out this identity at the highest level the one that governs every action or inaction determines our associations who's precious who's on our side who we're going to stand with and for let this identity that we are reformed redeemed rebels saved so that we can rebel in your goodness empower us by your spirit to do this today and the next day and for as many years as we have on this earth we are thankful and right now we proclaim your praise yet again through song you've been listening to a message at a

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