

## **A Special Treasure**

1 Peter 2:9-10

When I was 12, I received a modest inheritance from one of my grandparents, and I was able to buy my very own French horn. It was brand-new, nickel-silver, and it was mine. I don't play it nearly as much as I would like to any more, but I still have it.

Many years later, after I was married and we had children, God enabled us to purchase another instrument, a beautiful new baby grand piano, at such an amazing price that we simply couldn't pass it up. It was so beautiful in appearance and sound. And my daughters all learned to play the piano on that very special instrument. A treasured possession.

Have you ever had a really special treasure? For some, that might be a diamond ring! It might refer to a special car. For some, maybe a painting. Or a piece of furniture, or an antique. It might be something irreplaceable due to sentimental value. An heirloom. Or even a book or photo album. A special treasure.

And that is our subject this morning. Only the treasure is not an object. It is not a thing. It is a person. And that is understandable to us, too, isn't it? If I asked some of you about your special treasure, you would immediately tell me about another person. And so would I. I would certainly identify as a special treasure my wife, and my children. It isn't hard for me to talk about how special they are to me. I don't take that for granted. They are a blessing of God which I treasure with all my heart.

And that is the idea before us this morning in 1 Peter. Only the special treasure is us. It is we, together, we the church. We are the special treasure, and God is the one who treasures us.

We are special! And the first half of verse 9 gives to us,

### **I. OUR IDENTITY AS A CHURCH.**

v.9a

Identity is important, isn't it? We have come to understand it as a crucial element of our psychological health. You need to have a good sense of who you are, your identity. Struggles in that regard are commonly labeled an identity crisis. That can be crippling. It can cause all sorts of problems in your personal life. And it can cause all sorts of problems in the life of our church, too. All sorts of conflicts and divisions. From a failure to understand our identity.

Let me emphasize at the outset something I so often emphasize. Namely, that our identity is corporate. Our identity is not individualized. That is a great problem in our culture. It is a problem in our whole country, a country founded with a promotion of the virtue of self-sufficiency, the pioneering spirit. Rugged individualism. The identity of the individual is exalted, to the great neglect of the identity of the community. The body. And you need to recapture that sense of community if you expect to have a right and proper or healthy sense of your own identity. You need to appreciate that corporate identity if you are going to be able to take your place within the church successfully, as well.

We are trained to think in terms of ourselves, the benefits we receive, the "what's in it for me?" mentality. To use the first initials as an acronym, it's the WIIFM principle. In that context, too many people approach the church as a commodity to be purchased. They are the shoppers and the consumers, looking for the best bargain they can find. And too often, churches cater to that inherent selfishness, and end up missing the whole point of our identity. Our identity isn't in the satisfaction of our own needs and

desires. Our happiness and security, therefore, isn't tied up with any individual sense of self-fulfillment.

Quite to the contrary, what is important for us is what Peter stresses in our text this morning. And instead of looking at our identity in terms of ourselves, subjectively trying to identify what makes us happy and content, we need to stress our identity objectively. That is, seeing ourselves, together, as the object of God's covenant mercy. We are objects of God's love. Just look at the first half of verse 9 with me, and let me emphasize how each one of those phrases is rich with Old Covenant meaning and significance. What is your identity? What is our identity, together, as a church? We are...

#### **A. A chosen generation.**

Now, first of all, let me show how all of these identifications are taken from the Old Testament. All four of these identifications are clear and pronounced descriptions of God's Old Covenant people Israel.

Is. 43:1 "But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. 4 Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life. 5 Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west; 6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, And My

daughters from the ends of the earth-- 7 Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

Skipping down to,

v.20 "The beast of the field will honor Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I give waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My people, My chosen. 21 This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise."

God has chosen his people. Surely that is as clear as clear can be in Scripture.

Deut. 10:15 "The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day."

Deut. 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 "but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

So it is that we are the elect of God, the chosen of God, the generation or nation whom God has sovereignly called to be his own people. I emphasize that not to make a theological point that we can argue about with Christians who disagree, but rather to emphasize that foundation of our identity. We are chosen by God. We are Christians because God chose to love us. We are a church because God chose us to be his people. And, then, we

are,

### **B. A royal priesthood.**

Again, beloved, he is addressing the church. He is addressing us as the church. As John does in,

Rev. 1:4 “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

It is the same idea we studied in, v.5 “...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Priests offer sacrifices, in the temple. That’s what we have been studying for the last several weeks. We are those priests. All of us, the priesthood of all believers. We come to this place, this holy place, to offer our sacrifices of worship to God as he has prescribed. That’s what worship is, offering those sacrifices to God. And as priests, we also share in Christ’s royal authority as king. We are a royal priesthood. Amazing, isn’t it? All of these things define our identity because we are united with Christ. And even further, then, we are...

### **C. A holy nation.**

Such astounding language. The nation of God’s people was, of course, the nation of Israel. But now that nation, that holy nation set apart from all the other nations of the world, is the church of Jesus Christ. It is no longer the nation of earth

identified as Israel, and that’s very important to this day as you consider all the politics of the middle east.

Beloved, ethnic Israel is not the holy nation of God in our day. Israel is not the nation of God’s people set apart from all the other nations of the world. We are, we the church. According to Peter, we are the fulfillment of those Old Testament promises to Israel, promises such as,

Ex. 19:5 “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 ‘And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

A holy nation. That’s who we are. Paul goes so far as to call the church the “Israel of God.”

Gal. 6:15 “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

And then, the fourth title Peter uses. The fourth description of the identity of the church, rich in Old Testament background. We are,

### **D. A special treasure.**

v.9 “His own special people.”

Or, “a people for God’s own possession.” The language comes from Exodus 19 which I just read,

Ex. 19:5 “...you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.”

And also,

Deut. 26:18 “Also today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, 19 and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken.”

Over and over again in the Old Covenant, this becomes the focal point of the covenant promise of God. God considers us, the holy nation of his covenant people, to be his special treasure.

“A people belonging to God”, as the NIV puts it, is just not strong enough. We belong to God not simply in some official sort of way, but rather in the deepest and most intimate of all ways. “The LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people.”

The King James translates with the phrase, “peculiar people.” That’s a good translation, but it is not “peculiar” as in “strange,” but “peculiar” as in “special.” Treasured.

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”

Ex. 19:5 “...you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.”

That’s the idea. Treasured above all others. That is how God relates to his people. That’s how God identifies the church.

Let me explain a little about how that works. As a church, we have a baby shower this afternoon, don’t we? For Josh and Chelsea’s new baby. And baby’s are a treasure to us all. As are

all of our children. In these past four months, I have come to know many of your children, the children of this church, some rather well. And with a pastor’s love, I am eager for their well-being in every way, and I am very happy and content if the Lord would use my ministry in their lives to that goal. I have a genuine love and affection for them.

But there is something different to me, in my heart, between all of your children and my children. I honestly can say I love your children, but its a very general love, isn’t it? It is a pastor’s love. But I love my own children differently. They are special to me, for an obvious reason. They are my children! And for them, I have a father’s love.

That’s the focus of this description Peter uses. My own children are my own special treasure. Above all the other children I know, those three precious girls who belong to my family are my own treasured possession. And that’s how God looks upon us as a church. We are his own special people! His own special treasure. His own treasured possession. We are a people belonging to him, a people for his own possession! That’s who we are.

That’s our identity as a church. That’s my first point. But secondly, we should ask, what is...

## **II. OUR PURPOSE AS A CHURCH.**

Peter answers that question clearly, and I’m just walking through verse 9 with you this morning.

v.9

So what is our purpose? Why do we exist as a church?

### **A. To proclaim the praises of God.**

That is, perhaps, the simplest definition of worship you could produce. To proclaim his praises. To proclaim his virtues, his excellencies, his glory.

It is as the Psalmist puts it,

Ps. 8:1 “O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens!”

That is what we have come here to do this morning. “O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth.” That is the reason we exist. In it’s simplest form, that ought to be the purpose statement for Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church. To proclaim the glories and praises of God. And, in doing so,

### **B. To proclaim the praises of our salvation.**

And that is the very same thing, isn’t it? To proclaim the excellencies of God is to proclaim the excellencies of the salvation which God has worked. In the words of,

v.9 “...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

I should emphasize that your salvation is described and defined in terms of light. Spiritual death and separation from God is described in terms of darkness. Thus Paul explains the calling he received from Jesus with these words:

Acts 26:16 “But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 ‘I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 ‘to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are

sanctified by faith in Me.”

Paul describes the gospel he preaches with these words, 2 Cor. 4:5 “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

That’s the gospel. That’s the work of the church, to proclaim that gospel. We proclaim the glory of God, which is power of the gospel unto the salvation of the lost, opening their eyes, turning them from darkness to light, giving them the blessing of the forgiveness of sins and an eternal inheritance in heaven.

And so I proclaim to you that gospel, and I will use Jesus’ own words,

John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

If you don’t have that light yourself, then humble yourself. Confess your sins, and believe the promise Jesus is speaking. Believe in Jesus, and you will have eternal life.

If you already have that light yourself, then proclaim his praises as the sacrifice of worship you offer this morning. For this is who you are, as a member of Jesus’ church. That’s what you ought to be doing here, this morning, “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

And then,

### **III. OUR CONFIDENCE AS A CHURCH.**

My third point. Our identity is clear, we are a special treasure

to God. Our purpose is clear, we are to proclaim his excellencies. And we can have great confidence in doing just that, because,

**A. We are the covenant people of God.**

Speaking to Gentiles, especially, Peter says once you were “not a people.” Remember those children born to Hosea and Gomer? Lo-Ammi. Not my people. An identification of rejection, and judgment. “You, you over there, you are not mine.” “You do not belong to me.”

But now, Peter says, now you are my people! That’s the call of the gospel. That’s the call of God unto salvation, the call of redemption. And it was promised through Hosea.

Hos. 1:9 “Then God said: “Call his name Lo-Ammi, For you are not My people, And I will not be your God. 10 “Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’ 11 Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together, And appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel!”

Great will be the day of Jesus! For God “put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

God calls us to be his covenant people. He calls his elect from all the nations of the world. Paul makes that explicit in,

Eph. 2:11 “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the

Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

We are God’s covenant people. And that is our confidence. Our confidence is not in our pastor. Our confidence is not in our attendance, nor in our size. Not in our budget either. Our confidence is not in our programs, or our building. Certainly not in our denomination or presbytery. Instead, our confidence is in this proclamation of God, declaring us to be the covenant people of God! Then, to go back to Hosea again,

**B. We are recipients of God’s mercy.**

Again, in terms of confidence. When it comes to the gospel, when it comes to the church, it’s not about us at all. When we speak about the success or prosperity of the church, it’s not about us. It’s always about God, and its always about his mercy to us.

Do you remember Hosea’s second-born?

Hosea 1:6 “And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: “Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, For I will no

longer have mercy on the house of Israel, But I will utterly take them away. 7 Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, Will save them by the LORD their God, And will not save them by bow, Nor by sword or battle, By horses or horsemen.”

And then the great promise of the Lord through the prophet, Hosea 2:23 “Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’”

So what’s the point of all that? What’s the purpose for all of this? To give us as a church confidence. This is a time of uncertainty for us all. That elephant in the room I mentioned the first week that I preached during Brent’s sabbatical is still the elephant in the room. There are questions, with uncertainty, about the future of this church. And even while I point at that elephant and say, “there it is,” I emphasize these words from Peter that give us our identity and our purpose.

And they give us our confidence. God says to us, “You are my people.” God declares to us, “I will show you mercy.”

Rom. 8:31 “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

So, with that confidence, I call you to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Ps. 8:1 “O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth.”