



**Temple Baptist Church**  
**Wilmington, North Carolina**  
**Dr. Mark E. Gaskins, Senior Pastor**  
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**Remember Who We Are!**  
**1 Peter 2:1-10**

It's an old storyline that's really almost been overdone in movies and TV sitcoms and dramas.

You know the basic plot—some key character in the story experiences some kind of physical or emotional trauma, and gets *amnesia*. The character can't remember who he or she is, or who other people are, or anything about his or her life or family or home or work.

"Who are you? Where am I? Who am I?" No matter how hard the character tries, there's just no remembering anything. Family members and friends do everything they can to try to stimulate *some* kind of memory—familiar surroundings and faces, favorite foods or activities. *Nothing* works.

As the plot thickens in these stories, something happens—a chance meeting of someone from the past, another blow to the head, or just engaging in some routine activity. Then all of a sudden, it happens. The character *remembers* something, something about this activity, this place, or this person. The floodgates of memory open, and the character remembers everything, *including* himself or herself. He remembers *who he is!*

Sometimes when I look around me, I wonder if we Christians have developed a kind of spiritual amnesia. We do pretty well for a while, but then something happens, maybe something traumatic, and all of a sudden, we seem to forget who we are. We respond to people or circumstances in ways that are totally out of character. We forget to rely on the rich spiritual resources that are ours in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We forget that through the Holy Spirit, he's with us every step of the way—that he is indeed dwelling within us. It happens to us individually, and sometimes even as a congregation. And in the midst of it all, whether we ever put it into words or not, we ask, "Who are we?"

Nearly fifteen years ago, Billy Graham was being honored by leaders in Charlotte. As you would expect, a lot of wonderful things were said about him. After all, how do you not say wonderful things about Billy Graham?

After all the accolades, Mr. Graham stepped to the podium and said:

"I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist honored by Time magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his other pocket. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him. He couldn't find it. The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' Einstein nodded appreciatively.

"The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist on his hands and knees looking under his

seat for his ticket. The conductor rushed back. ‘Dr. Einstein, don't worry,’ he said. ‘I know who you are . . . . You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.’

“Einstein said, ‘Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.’”<sup>1</sup>

Friends, it's bad not to know where you're going, but isn't it a lot worse not to know who you are?

### **Who are we?**

Just who are we as Christians, as the church or Jesus Christ? The Apostle Peter can help us here.

In our text for today, 1 Peter 2:1-10, Peter calls his readers to rid themselves of **all malice, and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.**<sup>2</sup> Instead, **like newborn babies**, he calls them to **crave pure spiritual milk** that will help them grow up in their salvation.

Peter draws on vivid Old Testament imagery and ideas to remind them that Jesus Christ is himself the foundation, that **living Stone** that was **rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him**. Indeed, he is the **chosen and precious cornerstone** that God has laid in Zion (Isaiah 28:16). Christians come to this **living Stone**, and as we do, **like living stones** ourselves, we **are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**. So to us who believe, Christ the cornerstone is indeed **chosen and precious**. But for those who do not believe, he is **the stone the builders rejected** (Psalm 118:22), **a stone that causes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall** (Isaiah 8:14-15).

Peter then draws some strong language directly from the Old Testament to sharpen the contrast. Unlike those who **stumble because they disobey the message**, believers **are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession** (Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15; Isaiah 43:20-21; Exodus 19:5-6).

What's Peter doing here? These are all terms that applied to Israel in the Old Testament. But here he's applying them to the church, God's people made up of both Jews and Gentiles who have put their faith in Jesus as God's promised messianic king!

Think about what Peter says . . .

**We are a chosen people.** Now in our society, where the emphasis is *always* on fairness and equal access and opportunity, we may squirm a little when we hear this kind of language. But the Scriptures use this terminology over and over. In the Old Testament, Israel was *God's chosen people*. In the New Testament, the faithful remnant of Israel (those who received Jesus as the Messiah) served as the nucleus of the true Israel, the church, which includes all believers, Jews and Gentiles. Paul described Gentile believers as wild olive shoots that have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree of faithful Israel (Romans 11:17-21). Jesus, Paul, and Peter all use this language of being *chosen*.

And today, we would do well to recover this sense of *chosenness*! It might give us a greater sense of urgency in our mission. Just as a master carpenter carefully chooses his tools, so God has chosen us as his tools in the world, the people he is using to accomplish his redemptive purpose—both in us and through us.

Let this truth sink in—we are **a chosen people**! Not because of our goodness, but because of God's grace! Not to grand status, but to be his servants, ministering to and calling others to faith in Christ. Not just chosen for salvation, but also for service! To be God's chosen people is a

matter of *responsibility* as well as privilege!

*We're also a royal priesthood.* We belong to a people in which we're *all* priests—a **kingdom of priests** to use the Old Testament phraseology (Exodus 19:6).

As Protestants of the Baptist persuasion, for us the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is crucial! Being a royal priesthood is also as much as or more about *responsibility* as privilege. It's not *just* about access for ourselves—that we need no other mediator between God and us than Jesus Christ—though that *is* important. We're also to be priests to each other and to the world around us! God's intention for Israel as a kingdom of priests was to represent him to the nations and the nations to him, showing them what it means for a people to live under God's rule and mediating the word of God to them.

In essence, our task is the same. We are to be channels of God's word and grace as we minister to one another and bear witness to God's love in Christ to the world around us in both our words and our deeds.

*We're a holy nation* as well. We usually think of "holy" as being pure and righteous, and people who are holy certainly *should* be pure and righteous. But the more radical meaning of holiness has to do with being set apart. We've been set apart by God for his own special purposes and use, similar to how utensils were set apart in the tabernacle and temple for service in the worship of God. We are one nation made up of people from all nations, dedicated and set apart for the service of God in the world as he works out his redemptive purpose. And because we've been set apart, we're to live by Christ's standards, not the world's. Indeed, we are to be holy because the Lord our God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). We are to lose our lives for Christ's sake and for the gospel, and in doing so truly find them. We're to love one another as Christ loves us, and minister to the least among us, knowing that as we do, we're actually ministering to Christ.

*We are God's special possession*, echoing Exodus 19:5, **out of all nations you will be my treasured possession**. The King James Version translates it **a peculiar people**. Granted we Christians often are rather peculiar; but Peter is actually pointing to this special relationship God has established with us as his beloved people. It's about Jesus' lordship, his claims over us. He has redeemed us, having bought us with the price of his own blood. In turn, we are his free slaves, his agents in the world to accomplish his kingdom purposes.

Indeed, Peter says that God has made us all this so that we may **declare the praises**, or as the New Revised Standard Version translates it, **proclaim the mighty acts of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light** (2:9).

And what are those mighty acts? Again, Peter draws on the Old Testament, this time from the prophet Hosea: **once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy** (2:10). Once it was all darkness and gloom for us; now we live and walk in God's light, redeemed, set free, sharing in the salvation of God!

### ***A call to remember***

Now there's a lot we don't know about the background of 1 Peter, but one thing is certain. His readers either were facing or were about to face severe persecution. Trauma was headed their way. You might say they were at risk for spiritual amnesia.

Out of his concern to help these believers to whom he was writing remain faithful, Peter

encouraged them to live **as foreigners and exiles** in the world, keeping faith with their own commitment to Jesus as Lord (2:11).

So drawing on these Old Testament images of what it means to be God's people, *Peter reminded Christians who were facing persecution that they were a special, called community of faith—a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession* (2:9). And he called them to *live* as this community.

Isn't his call for us as well? Isn't this text *reminding us who we are*, and calling us to live all of life in light of who we are as Christians? Every area must be permeated by our identity, and we must live in keeping with that identity in good times and bad, prosperity and adversity.

Some years ago, a member of the church I was serving at the time was sharing some memories of his mother in his teen years. He said that on Saturdays when he and his brother would go out for the evening, every week without fail, as they went out the door she would always say, "Remember whose son you are."

Whether this story I read in a devotional many years ago is fact or fiction, I don't know. But it goes like this.

In the days of the French monarchy there lived a young, undisciplined, misbehaving heir to the throne. The royal family had hired a tutor to instruct this future king, but like so many teachers today, his efforts constantly met with frustration. He didn't dare punish a prince, but something had to be done! So after much careful thought, the teacher decided what to do. He bought a short piece of purple ribbon and pinned it on the prince's lapel. Then looking him in the eye, he told his royal student, "Sir, whenever you behave in a manner unbecoming of the French throne, I shall point to the royal color on your coat and make my appeal by that."

***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

My dear brothers and sisters, that's our royal color; that's the purple ribbon on our lapels!  
Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> *Leadership Journal*, Spring 2003, 24:2, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (2011 edition).