

Who are you?

How we answer that question kind of depends on the situation and who's asking.

A complete stranger says, "Who are you?" I'm going to answer one way.

But if my wife says to me, "Who are you?" My response is going to be different.

And if I'm at a job interview and we sit down after introductions have been made and I'm asked, "Jacob, who are you?" I'm going to respond I yet another way.

Who are you?

Who you are is more than just the letters of your name. It's your reputation (if a spouse says "Who are you?" they know how you typically act and react, and you've probably just acted out of character). It's your name, your reputation, your accomplishments and skills (who you are in a job interview is where you've worked before, where you went to school, what you love to do, what you are good at, what you are not very good at).

Who are you? It is a question whose answer depends on the situation and who's asking.

Today, Peter reminds us of yet another way we can answer that question. And really, Peter's answer to that question is the most important way because it's who God says you are.

**You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.**

Talk about a remarkable way to answer that question, right?

**You are a chosen people.** Of the 7.5 billion people on earth, of the countless billions of people who have lived in the past, God chose you. The Bible says that before the creation of the World God chose you to be his very own – and not just generic you (as if God just randomly selected some people from the crowd). He knows who you are better than you do. He knows your name. He knows how many hairs are on your head. He knows what you are going to say before you say it. He knows what your heart desires. He understands what's going on in your life even when you can't even put your thoughts into words.

**You are a chosen people.**

**You are a royal priesthood.** Priests, as a reminder, are those who have the right to come into the presence of God and not immediately be killed. Priests are those who have the honor of approaching God with freedom and confidence because God has given them that right. And not just any priests, you are **royal** priests – there is a kingdom involved here and you have royal blood pumping through your veins, which means the kingdom is yours.

**You are a royal priesthood.**

**You are a holy nation.** God had a dream for the Old Testament Israelite people: that they would be this unique nation that would enjoy a special relationship with him. They would live in harmony with each other and God would bless them in unparalleled ways. The Israelites repeatedly failed to hold up their end of the bargain. God's response: "I'm going to widen the net. I'm going to make a new nation. I'm going to go out and find more people from all around the world that I can enjoy a special relationship with and bless in unparalleled ways." And we are that nation.

**You are a holy nation.**

**You are God's special possession.** 5 years ago on Black Friday, at Home Depot of all places, I found a giant teddy bear (it's almost as tall as I am, filled with wonderful fluff). I bought it for my then 2 year old daughter. Hands down, the best purchase I have ever made. I stuffed him in a giant box, saved it for Christmas, and my one regret is that I didn't have a camera rolling when she opened it. And her love for Big Big Bear (that's his name) has not wavered to this day. Take my daughters love of Big Big Bear, add a God-sized spoonful of perfect love, and that is what you are to God – his special, treasured possession.

Who are you?

God's answer to that question: **You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.**

And that is just scratching the surface of these God-given identities. There is a whole lot more I could say about each one of these, and it's worth meditating on (I'd encourage you to do that this next week. Take your bulletin home today and just read these verses first thing every morning; try on these identities), but for our purposes today I want to consider what Peter says connects all of these identities. Peter says, "**You are [all of these things] so that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**"

The thing that ties all these identities together, the reason God calls you all of these things is so that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

God gives you this identity and that identity comes with a purpose, a job description. In God's answer to the question "who are you?" you exist to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Please understand, this is an all-encompassing identity. No matter where you go in life or what you are doing, this is who you are, so this is your purpose, God says.

So, you are a kid who spends most of your day at home or at school. As a chosen people, royal priest, holy nation, special possession kid your purpose is to declare the praises of God. Every conversation with your parents, every minute spent playing video

games and watching YouTube, every class at school, every recess, every lunch, every basketball practice, no matter where you are or what you are doing, God wants you to be declaring his praises.

So, you are a husband/father, mother/wife who spends a good deal of your time providing for your family. As a people, priest, nation, possession parent or spouse your purpose is to declare the praises of God. When you are making breakfast in the morning, picking your kids up from school, driving to practices, overseeing homework, doing dishes, washing laundry, going for a walk, planning a vacation, no matter where you are or what you are doing God wants you to be declaring his praises.

You are an employer, employee, or retired who spends a good deal of time at work, or you have extra time that you never had before. As a people, priest, nation, possession your purpose is to declare the praises of God. No matter what your profession is, no matter how you earn your living, when you are giving an IV, preparing taxes, grading papers, plowing snow, fixing plumbing, no matter where you are or what you are doing God wants you to be declaring his praise.

**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.**

That doesn't mean that you walk through life on repeat like some street corner preacher with a megaphone: Do you know about the one who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light? X3. Certainly, when the time is right (and probably far more often than we currently do) that is a question God wants us to ask, but declaring his praises goes beyond just telling people what God has done. Declaring God's praises means going through life doing everything to the best of your ability, to the glory of God. So, it is having the guts to talk about God to those around you, and it is just living in love the way God wants you to.

Some of you have heard me say this before, but Martin Luther took this God-given identity and applied it to a shoe maker. He said that the Christian shoe maker isn't Christian because he puts a little cross on the sole of every shoe he makes. He is living out his God-given identity when he makes the best shoe he can make, day in and day out. And he's always prepared to give the reason why he works so hard to make the best shoes possible for his customers, but living out this identity is more than that. Everything he does out of love for God and his neighbor is declaring the praises of him who called him out of darkness in to his wonderful light.

God says you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his special possession... but are you living like it?

I'm guessing a lot of you are like me and could answer that question: "Sometimes."

But all of you, like me, if you slow down your day and think about what you are doing, and why you are doing it, "declaring the praises of God" is often not the only, or even remotely motivating factor behind what you do.

Because do you know who I am?

I am selfish. I am arrogant. I am over-confident. I am foolish. I am discontented. I am envious.

And those identities I was born with wreak havoc on God's purpose for me.

And you have your own list of identities. Maybe some are the same as mine, maybe some are different – they are all the things that wreak havoc on God's purpose.

So what? Does that mean I'm in danger of being unchosen by God? Is God going to confiscate my "royal priest card"? Is God's ICE unit going to knock down my door and deport me from his holy nation? Is God going to stuff me in a garbage bag and leave me by the curb like a ratty old stuffed animal that no one uses anymore?

He should, right? He has every right to. He called me all of these wonderful things and all I've done take these beautiful identities and dragged them through the mud.

The really good news today is in the verbs.

God didn't say, "You *might be* a chosen people if you show me you deserve it." He didn't say, "You could be if you play your cards right. You should be; you used to be; you aren't."

God says, "**You are.**" – Present tense; the God who knows everything about you says, "**You are.**"

**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. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

And you know why God can use those verbs for people like us, right?

Because this identity is not something you earn (so that you could lose it if you fail), but it is something God gives you. From God's perspective your identity isn't what have or haven't done for him lately; it's what he declares you to be.

Just like in the beginning, when there was no light, God declared, "Let there be light." And it was so. When I wasn't his people, God declared, "You are my people." And it was so. When the last thing I deserved from God was mercy, God declared, "You are forgiven." And it was so.

This identity isn't something we earn. It is something God gives.

Who are you?

You are who God declares you to be.

**You are his chosen people** – yes, you! You, with all of your failures, God chose you. You are not your failures, you are what God declares you to be: his chosen people.

**You are a royal priesthood** – yes, you! You who don't deserve to set foot in the presence of a God who once declared, "No sinner can see me and live," can approach God with all the freedom and confidence of a prince walking into his palace because you are what God declares you to be: a royal priest.

**You are a holy nation.** "Holy" is not a word that anyone who really knows me could use to describe me. God should send his ICE angels to drive me far away. But I am what God declares me to be, and so are you: a holy nation.

**You are God's special possession.** You, with all the rattiness and ugliness of your failures are what God declares you to be: his special possession.

This is who you are. So, let's start acting like it. Let's start purposefully, everywhere we are, and in everything we do, declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Amen.